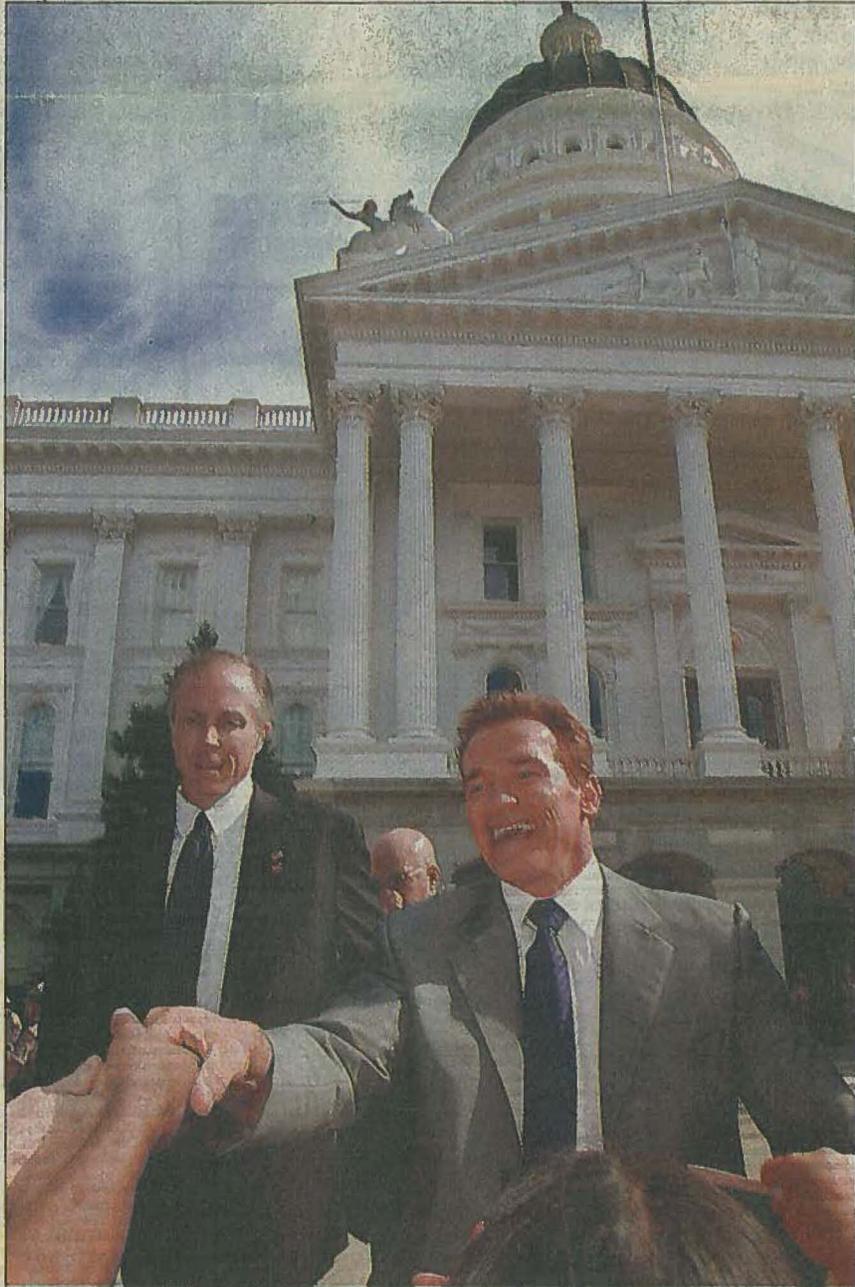


CAPITOL IDEAS



Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger, in Sacramento yesterday, told California lawmakers to expect a special session on the state's budget crisis. Story, A9.

AP

By Shawn Steel

Was the recall of Gray Davis and the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger a sign of political realignment here in the Golden State? Thirty years in California politics tells me yes, but whether this mini-realignment takes root hinges on what Schwarzenegger does during the next few months.

The members of what Hoover Institution scholar Bill Whalen has dubbed "Arnold's Army" come from every demographic. Arnold won majorities or large pluralities among Republicans and independents, men and woman, Catholic and non-Catholic Christians, moderates and conservatives, whites and Asians, first-time and regular voters, union and non-union voters, and every age group. He captured a respectable 31 percent of Latino voters and 42 percent of union households; if you add in Tom McClintock's votes, those numbers swell to 41 percent and 56 percent percent, respectively. Despite Mr. McClintock's effort the bulk of Arnold's voters were self-identified conservatives.

While antipathy toward Mr. Davis fueled much of this vote, the fact remains a broad cross-section of Californians punched their chads for the Terminator. The tricky part for Arnold is converting this ad hoc coalition into a permanent majority.

Just as soft pottery clay is hardened by being fired in a kiln, Mr. Schwarzenegger can harden the loyalty and solidity of his coalition by leading them into an all-out battle for his campaign platform: reducing the burden of taxes, regulation and workers compensation costs that are stifling job creation; rescinding the raising of the car tax and the issuing

'Arnold's Army'

Will it be a lasting governing majority?

of drivers licenses to illegal immigrants; and ending the domination of state government by special interests, especially public employee unions and casino tribes.

Some Democratic legislators will work with Mr. Schwarzenegger, inevitably most will fight him tooth and



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Arnold Schwarzenegger

nail. Encouragingly, Arnold has put them on notice he'll respond to such obstructionism with Conan-like ferocity by taking the fight directly to voters via initiative. This will stoke the fire and heat necessary to harden his coalition, and keep the disparate elements of Arnold's Army from turning their swords on each other.

Speaking of internecine warfare,

this mini-realignment cannot hold unless Arnold ends the state GOP's intra-party fighting. The conservative and moderate factions of California Republicanism resemble the squabbling Scottish clans in the movie "Braveheart": too busy fighting over their respective claims to the throne to deal with the real enemy. Mr. Schwarzenegger must transcend that fight and unite the GOP clans by focusing them against the common foe: the liberal Democrats and their attendant special interests.

First, Arnold needs to secure his right flank. Conservatives' desire to win was so keen they overlooked his liberal social stances on abortion, gay rights and guns — a significant concession Arnold should return by declining to push those issues. If he does that, and wages a ferocious fight for items of agreement such as lower taxes, Arnold can turn this marriage of convenience into one approximating love. Besides, California can't get much more liberal in terms of abortion, gay rights and gun control, so Mr. Schwarzenegger has little to lose. Arnold can afford to ignore any resulting complaints from moderate Republicans, since they're the ones with no place else to go.

Arnold should a message unity by squashing any moderate attempt to mount a revenge challenge to Mr. McClintock in his Senate primary. Mr. McClintock's candidacy did more than any Republican in years to persuasively articulate the conservative case for fiscal responsibility and pro-

growth policies. Actively backing Mr. McClintock's re-election would send a powerful signal to conservatives that Arnold is interested in leading the GOP to dominance — not in leading a moderate jihad against the right.

Finally, Mr. Schwarzenegger absolutely cannot back off his pledge not to raise taxes. Already, the media has struck up the familiar chorus for higher taxes, intimating that all will be forgiven if Arnold will agree to a tax increase to close the budget deficit. Heeding that advice would be tantamount to signing his own political death warrant. Arnold may not have formally signed "The Pledge," but that distinction will be lost on voters if he ditches his promise and agrees to a tax increase. It will sunder his fledgling coalition and shatter his credibility with the voters.

Mr. Schwarzenegger has his work cut out for him, both as governor and politician. By the spring, the consequences of his actions will make it clear whether the broad coalition of Republicans, independents and Democrats who elected him will prove to be a lasting governing majority, or a remarkable but evanescent Election Day phenomenon.

Shawn Steel is co-founder of the Gray Davis recall and immediate past chairman of the California Republican Party.