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San Francisco Chronicle

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INITIATIVES AT HOME AND ABROAD Challenging the status quo

Tony Strickland, Shawn Steel
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With the world's sixth largest economy, California has long served as the bellwether for national economic success. When California struggles, our whole nation suffers. Simply put, our nation cannot achieve a complete economic recovery until California's economy thrives.

That is why we have organized the California Club for Growth. The California Club for Growth is

a supply-side economic group committed to economic growth through limited government and lower taxes. Modeled after the national Club for Growth, we firmly believe that we cannot tax our way to an economic recovery. With Ronald Reagan's favorite economist, Art Laffer, serving as chairman, we are working hard to make sure that California government turns toward economic expansion. We do not engage on topics concerning social or moral issues. We focus on economic freedom, but we frame that focus in Reaganesque terms of liberty, opportunity and taming the government "monster."

To achieve our goal, the California Club for Growth's political-action committee has an aggressive strategy to recruit, promote and elect leaders who believe that economic success requires lower taxes. Our primary method for success is by bundling small political contributions into meaningful support. Several years ago, the political activists at EMILY's List (Early Money Is Like Yeast) realized the power of bundling small contributions expressly for Democratic women. Instead of having one

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political action committee make a single contribution to a campaign, they asked their members to support candidates with their seal of approval. By bundling contributions, EMILY's List was able to elect its slate of candidates. A brilliant concept, of course, EMILY's List is a huge factor in the Democratic Party.

The Club for Growth works the same way. We interview candidates for state offices, research their background and economic philosophy. Once we select our candidates, we ask our members to provide maximum financial support. With a membership base of more than a thousand, one recommendation from the California Club for Growth can make any candidate viable. (By comparison, National Club for Growth raised more than \$20 million in 2004 and elected numerous U.S. representatives and two senators.)

Because we are nonpartisan, we can maximize our impact by endorsing candidates in the primary election. Republicans and Democrats in the California Legislature should know that no party label or incumbency status will protect them. The California Club for Growth is watching. When politicians (particularly Republicans) raise taxes, the club will work to remove them from office.

Our organization also does not stop with the election of Club for Growth candidates. In order to ensure that our candidates continue to support sound economic policies, we track legislation, publish scorecards and update our members on important votes before the Legislature.

We are joining Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's reform movement by promoting initiatives directly to voters, avoiding politicians in Sacramento. It's a huge gamble. In support of the governor's agenda, the California Club for Growth has filed two initiatives to help him substantially redesign California's economic climate.

-- Our first initiative, Fair Competition and Taxpayers Savings Act, would allow local governments to contract with private companies if the goods or services can be provided cheaper. In his last year, Gov. Gray Davis signed legislation prohibiting local governments from contracting out services to California vendors. This limits competition and is unfair. This initiative will save taxpayers millions of dollars a year, simply by offering choice and competition.

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-- We also are proponents of the Merit Pay Initiative that would give economic incentives for hard-working and capable teachers.

It is entirely possible that Schwarzenegger will hit a home run, winning with a number of initiatives this fall. To escape the economic recession of the early 1980s, President Ronald Reagan adopted aggressive supply-side economic policies. They helped produce one of the greatest economic expansions in history. Like Reagan, the governor also realizes that limiting government and lowering taxes is a proven formula for economic success.

This is a struggle that California Club for Growth is happy to join.

Former Assemblyman Tony Strickland is president of the California Club for Growth (<http://www.caclubforgrowth.com/>). Shawn Steel is the outgoing state Republican chairman and a director of the California Club for Growth.

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