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Will Arnold jump the shark?

After faltering in push to reform state, governor seems to get a second wind



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but it's perfectly applicable to politics as well. Its genesis is the infamous "Happy Days" episode in which water-skiing, leather-jacket-clad Fonzie jumped a man-eating shark – signaling the long-running sitcom had no good ideas left, and it was all downhill from there.

The governor's actions and comments during the last few weeks have left a number of observers – me included – wondering whether or not Schwarzenegger has jumped. It's not just how he's done little to respond to the relentless attacks from the public employee unions. It's the ping-ponging statements on immigration. It's the unnerving process of watching him jettison plank after plank from his reform platform, most recently the public employee pension-reform initiative. A tactical retreat can be a sound political maneuver – but too many

The month of May will likely prove to be the tipping point of Arnold Schwarzenegger's governorship – when we will find out if he can fulfill the political destiny he set for himself during the Davis recall or if it marks the point when his political career "jumped the shark."

"Jumping the shark" is a term from the TV world,

of them and it becomes a rout.

The governor seems to have sensed this and is finally finding his footing again. For one, he is finally responding to the vicious pounding he's receiving from union attack ads for the last several weeks by airing an ad of his own, featuring the governor exhorting regular folks on the need to rein in and reform an out-of-control, spendthrift state government. The ad emphasizes the governor's strengths – his charismatic personality and devotion to the big picture of restoring the California dream.

Secondly, he is actually turning in signatures for reform initiatives. As of this writing, Schwarzenegger has submitted signatures for the merit pay initiative (of which I am a co-sponsor) and the redistricting initiative. Submittal of the paycheck protection initiative is also imminent.

It was absolutely critical that Schwarzenegger not back away from these measures. If he had decided to call it a day in the face of union attacks and pushed his reform initiatives off until the June 2006 primary, his opponents in the Legislature and the unions would have reacted naturally – like a pack of wolves catching the scent of a wounded elk.

After sounding like an uncertain trumpet of late, Schwarzenegger seems to be sending consistent signals again. He deep-sixed recent talk of watering his redistricting initiative down, and will go with the original plan of redrawing the lines

as soon as possible.

The paycheck protection initiative is a fiery cannon shot across public employee union bows. The governor hasn't formally endorsed it, but he's sure made some warm and fuzzy sounds about it. What does he have to lose, after all? Blood has been drawn and battle lines formed. The public employee unions are in this fight to win; the governor gains nothing by restraint.

Winning on this initiative would significantly declaw government unions, which are nothing more than big government organized as a special interest. The unions only narrowly defeated a much-broader paycheck protection initiative in 1998 after outspending it 30 to 1. The support of a charismatic governor with lots of fund-raising muscle and much greater credibility and popularity with the public than the unions would put this public employee unions-only version over the top.

So has the governor jumped the shark? My answer is a tentative, hopeful "no" – or at least not yet. The game is still very much afoot and lots of variables can combine and recombine to scramble or enhance the governor's fortunes.

Still, Arnold has made a habit of confounding the conventional wisdom, and my gut tells me he will turn this cliff-hanger around in his direction. But only so long as he remembers that old Latin expression, *audentes fortuna juvat*: "Fortune favors the bold."