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**ADVANCED-DATE:** December 4, 2004**SECTION:** COMMENTARY**LENGTH:** 728 words**HEADLINE:** Schwarzenegger could sell logical reforms to cautious voters**SOURCE:** Sacramento Bee**BYLINE:** DAN WALTERS**BODY:**

Let's assume, at least momentarily, that Arnold Schwarzenegger will, indeed, capitalize on his extraordinary popularity in the forthcoming year by sponsoring a package of "government reform" ballot measures and calling a special election to enact them.

What should such a package contain? What could the governor devise that would improve the relevance of government to a rapidly evolving society, give taxpayers more bang for their bucks and foster economic expansion, while passing muster with a centrist electorate?

Theorists at the Claremont **Institute**, Public Policy **Institute** of California, Hoover Institution, Center for the Continuing Study of the California Economy, Rand Corporation, **Rose Institute**, Millken **Institute**, Pat Brown **Institute** and other think tanks could, if asked, bury the Capitol in detailed proposals to overhaul our dysfunctional governmental apparatus.

However, the worst thing Schwarzenegger could do would be to propose something so radical as to alienate middle-of-the-road voters who are understandably leery about nostrums purporting to cure California's ills. If he proceeds, Schwarzenegger must advance reforms that are both reasonable and understandable, and that do not appear to favor one political, social or economic faction. He must be able to sell the package, as he has sold himself, as benefiting the broader interest.

That said, here are a few suggestions in no particular order of importance:

**STRUCTURE** - A reorganization of state agencies along more functional lines, eliminating overlap, duplication and competition, not only would save some money, but also improve accountability, reduce confusion in the public's contact with agencies, and give regulated industries clearer guidelines. Public education, with its pass-the-buck organizational chart, is especially in need of streamlining.

**POLITICAL REFORM** - We should shift legislative redistricting to an independent commission that would create compact districts reflecting true communities of interest. It probably wouldn't change the balance of partisan power in the Legislature much, if any, but it would narrow the ever-widening ideological gap that disenfranchises independent voters and moderates in both parties. With that change, a softening of term limits - allowing legislators to serve their entire allotments in one house, for example - would be justified. Another good step would be to replace increasingly complex, and largely ineffective, campaign finance laws

with a simple requirement for full and immediate disclosure of contributions.

**PENSIONS** - The huge expansion of public pension benefits testifies to the political clout of unions, but threatens vital public services, because of rapidly escalating costs, and also drives a cultural wedge between civil servants and the public they supposedly serve. Without disturbing benefits of those now in the system, a reasonable reform would gradually shift from traditional pensions to the "defined contribution" plans which have become commonplace in the private sector.

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS** - Schwarzenegger-backed Proposition 1A gave local government revenues protections from state raids, but should be only a first step toward redefining fiscal relations. Local governments are too dependent on sales taxes driven by retail development, while the state is too dependent on highly volatile personal income taxes, and a partial revenue swap would be in the long-term best interests of both, as well as the taxpaying public.

**BUDGET** - The chronic, multi-billion-dollar structural state budget deficit is proof that our system of collecting and disbursing state revenues is faulty, mostly because it operates on an ad hoc, year-to-year basis with no longer-term focus. Multi-year spending plans, with a strict separation between special and general funds, are sorely needed. A reasonable spending limit, meanwhile, would temper the boom-and-bust cycle that's become so poisonous. If we continue to fly by the seat of our pants, we will continue to crash.

Were Schwarzenegger to achieve improvements in these areas, it would set the stage for the deeper reforms that we also need. We need to learn to crawl before we can walk or run. And when it comes to effective government, California can't even sit up.

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