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Community news

COMMENTARY

Tuesday, May 3, 2005

Schwarzenegger's second wind?

Getting initiatives qualified for ballot might give governor new leverage on his reforms.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger may have regained some momentum in his efforts to reform state government. As reported by the Sacramento Bee over the weekend, the governor is predicting he will have the necessary signatures by the end of this week to qualify three initiatives for the ballot in November.

By Sunday, he said he expected to have the signatures for his tenure reform, and by the end of the week, for redistricting and budget initiatives. "We are doing extremely well," the governor told a group of reporters.

The tenure initiative would increase to five years from two the time it takes for a teacher to gain tenure. The redistricting initiative would take that role from the Legislature, which gerrymandered districts after the Census, and give to a panel of retired judges. And the budget initiative would permit state spending to be an average of revenue growth of the previous three years.

As we have said before, we have been disappointed that the governor has backed away from strong the reforms he outlined earlier this year. But progress in signature-gathering at least gives him leverage with the Legislature. We'll watch closely to see if he can regain the strength he once projected on the he will continue excessively to compromise.

For example, we hope he insists that redistricting begin before the 2006 primary, so voters have real year, and not be postponed to after the 2010 U.S. Census.

The progress on the initiative signatures gives the governor "ammunition in negotiations with the Leg Steven Frates, senior fellow at the Rose Institute of state and local Government at Claremont McKerr told us. "That's the most important factor. Democrats in the Legislature will have to deal with the initiative forward and possibly being successful. That changes the political calculus."

We agree with Mr. Frates that the budget reform the governor is pushing could have been stronger if it had limited state's runaway spending. A better reform was proposed by state Sen. John Campbell, R-Irvine, which limited budget increases to increases in inflation plus population. But the initiative the governor is going

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would provide more limits than we have now.

And "the initiatives are worth putting effort into in that they nudge the Legislature to do the right thing added. "Politics is the art of the possible, not the perfect. And you never know, the Democrats may g refuse to negotiate [on legislation to do the same thing and so preclude the need for the initiatives]or negotiations. They may gamble the public doesn't pass the initiatives. But if they do pass, the govern strengthened considerably."

We urge the governor to realize that, in these reforms, the people are with him. They don't want more. They want victory.

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