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THE JOLLY GREEN GIANT?

[Governor **Schwarzenegger** could teach other Republicans a thing or two about protecting the environment. That is, if he doesn't self-destruct first]

by **Wade Graham**

On June 1, this past spring, I got to glimpse a day in the life of Arnold Schwarzenegger, the governor of California. That afternoon, at City Hall in San Francisco, Mayor Gavin Newsom was hosting United Nations World Environment Day, the U.N.'s equivalent of Earth Day. In a huge, high-ceilinged room, ranks of state officials and big-city mayors from six continents sat onstage, while several hundred invited guests and nearly half again as many members of the press waited for the governor to appear and kick off the event. ■ Outside on the square, a small fleet of prototype hydrogen cars was parked, attended by banners, blaring music, and clots of PR people ready to answer questions. All of the major German and Japanese auto companies were represented, each with a small minivan. Ford was there, with its 2006 low-emission Focus sedan. So was General Motors, with its massive, military-style hydrogen

ILLUSTRATION BY MARK ULRIKSEN

Hummer, developed expressly for Schwarzenegger—emblematic, perhaps, of the governor's clunky evolution from Conan the Barbarian to environmental statesman.

After making the dignitaries and press rabble wait for an hour, the governor arrived and proceeded to announce a groundbreaking global-warming initiative. "I say, the debate is over," he boomed, explicitly dismissing the Bush administration's contrary position. "We know the science, we see the threat, and we know the time for action is now." The targets he set were impressive, going beyond what even the Kyoto treaty would mandate: By 2010 California's per capita greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced to 2000 levels; by 2020 reduced to 1990 levels; and by 2050 reduced to 80 percent below 1990 levels. Then the governor sat down at a Lilliputian desk and signed an executive order. The crowd erupted in a standing ovation.

But before the applause died down, a stir of chanting and hooting was heard from a picket line of 50 or 60 nurses, many of them men got up in outrageous drag (this being San Francisco), carrying signs and marching in a circle, chanting, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Schwarzenegger's got to go!" As the doors were opened to the grand rotunda, where a reception had been prepared with smiling hostesses, tables piled high with hors d'oeuvres, and bartenders pouring wine, the nurses burst into the building and swirled up the staircases into the upstairs galleries, their chanting echoing off the walls. Below, prominent environmentalists nibbled shrimp and smiled somewhat uncertainly. An R&B band began to play as loudly as it could, but the musicians couldn't possibly drown out the political ruckus threatening to engulf Schwarzenegger's remaining term as governor.

THE BEGINNING was full of promise. Six weeks after announcing his candidacy in a special election in 2003, Arnold Schwarzenegger released an "Action Plan for California's Environment" that startled Democrats and Republicans alike. It was a remarkable document by any measure; the final draft proposed to invest in clean energy and technology, including hybrid and hydrogen vehicles, to implement greenhouse gas emissions rules, and to resist the Bush administration's push to gut power-plant pollution controls and to lift a longstanding moratorium on offshore oil drilling. It also committed the state to some major, quantified goals, especially on air pollution and electricity: to cut power consumption by 20 percent by some undetermined date, to reduce air pollution by up to 50 percent by 2010, to see 50 percent of new housing developments install solar panels by 2005, and to generate 20 percent of public power from renewable sources, such as wind, solar, and geothermal, by 2010 (seven years in advance of the timetable established by the Democratic incumbent, Governor Gray Davis).

In addition to the pollution and energy provisions, his plan also contained a laundry list of other goals long sought by the state's environmental advocates: more mass transit, more green buildings, more inner-city parks. It could have been written by an enviro—a liberal and visionary one. It was.

In the late morning of World Environment Day, before traveling to San Francisco for his global warming announcement, the governor briefed me on the genesis of his environmental platform. We sat outside, under a tent furnished with chairs, a low table, and an ashtray for his cigars, on the otherwise empty roof terrace of the Hyatt hotel in Sacramento, directly across the street from the Capitol. During the workweek, Schwarzenegger not only occupies a large suite in the hotel, which he pays for himself, but also works here to escape the Capitol, with its low ceilings and hallways densely packed with police officers, tourists, and schoolchildren on field trips. When he first took office, he had a tent put up in the courtyard of the Capitol so that he could enjoy his cigars. But Democratic legislators with office windows on the courtyard complained about the smoke and even threatened to pass a law extending the required smoking distance from the building—which the governor threatened to veto in a move that reflected his deteriorating relationship with the Democratic-controlled legislature. His new tent atop the Hyatt looks at the Capitol dome, but mostly beyond it, into the milky summer haze of the Sacramento Valley.

Schwarzenegger has long been close to Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a first cousin of the governor's wife, Maria Shriver. According to Schwarzenegger, soon after he announced his candidacy for governor, Bobby Kennedy called him and said, "Look, I think it would be good if you, as a Republican, would talk about the environment. You'd be much more effective than us Democrats"

He cited a credo I would think about in the coming days: "The trick with politics is that you walk the **tightrope**. If you step too far to the right you fall, if you step too far to the left you fall"

—more effective, presumably, in reaching across traditional partisan lines and advancing environmental goals among the business community and other constituencies that are generally Republican allies. Besides, both men knew that any Republican hoping to win the governorship of California would have to reassure its heavily Democratic, proenvironment electorate of his bona fides. Kennedy suggested that Schwarzenegger call Terry Tamminen, then the director of the Santa Monica-based foundation Environment Now. "Call this guy," Kennedy told him. "He will come over and work with you."

Terry Tamminen boasts a very eclectic career: He has at various times been a ship captain, the manager of a sheep ranch and a real estate company, a recycling consultant for the government of Nigeria, and the owner of a pool maintenance company in Malibu. He's written *The Ultimate Pool Maintenance Manual* and, according to his official state bio, several theatrical works on the life of William Shakespeare. He flies planes and helicopters and speaks German, Dutch, and Spanish. In Malibu, he met some environmentally inclined people who helped him found the Santa Monica Baykeeper; he ran the organization for six years before taking the helm of Environment Now in 1999.

Tamminen and Schwarzenegger hit it off: "I loved working with this guy," the governor told me. "He explained everything in kind of simple terms." Tamminen spent part of a day at the Schwarzeneggers' house with the governor, his wife, and the couple's four children, all of whom weighed in on the issues. After their discussions, Schwarzenegger and Tamminen agreed that "the trick is, how do you encourage

businesses to grow and at the same time take care of the environment,” in Schwarzenegger’s words. He asked Tamminen to fill in the details and write the “Action Plan,” and gives him full credit for the vision it lays out: “This is really all Terry’s thing. I’m there basically to say, ‘Yes, these are great ideas,’ and put my stamp of approval on it.” The ideas Tamminen brought to him, Schwarzenegger admitted, “may have been things that I’d never even heard about. I was really never out there fighting for those causes until I started running for office.”

It was a case of recognizing political expediency, certainly, although Schwarzenegger tried to persuade me that the roots of his environmentalism reach deep into his past. He was receptive to Tamminen’s ideas, he told me, because of the connections he makes in his own mind between fitness and a healthy environment. To him, the constant quest for improvement that bodybuilding requires applies in some sense equally to the human body and the natural world. Such a notion doesn’t seem too outlandish in Southern California.

He also pointed to his childhood in the picturesque village of Thal in the mountains of eastern Austria. To earn a living, many of his relatives worked in a steel mill in the nearby industrial city of Graz, “where every day when you wiped the windows your whole towel filled with a black substance on it because the factory was right in the middle of town.” The river that runs through Graz, the Mur, he remembered, “was considered one of the dirtiest rivers in middle Europe.” Gradually, over the past four decades, awareness of these issues became more acute in Austria, prompting people to work “very aggressively to clean up the environment,” Schwarzenegger told me. “When I was a kid, you couldn’t see the bottom of that river. Now you can.”

In Austria these days, environmental protection is an issue of national pride, not of left or right, and all politicians are of necessity proenvironment. Schwarzenegger’s views would make him a fairly typical right-of-center politician in Austria.

The governor spoke often about the need to govern from the center, about finding a balance between environmental protection and economic growth. When I asked him what he thought the most important factor was in advancing the environmental agenda, he answered in one word: “Redistricting.” This is one of the core reform proposals he’s placed on a special-election ballot slated for November 8, when he will put to direct vote his proposition for moving the power to redraw districts from the legislature to a panel of retired judges. “We have to blend the two parties together,” he said. “That is, I think, the fundamental change that has to happen—to bring people to the middle.” Yet the election itself has become bitterly divisive and partisan.

In our conversation, he cited a credo that I would think about often in the coming days: “The trick with politics is that you walk the

tightrope. If you step too far to the right you fall, if you step too far to the left you fall.”

AFTER HIS ELECTION, Schwarzenegger named Terry Tamminen the head of the California Environmental Protection Agency. Out of the gate, the Schwarzenegger administration got to work on its environmental agenda. The governor, for instance, has vigorously defended the state’s authority to regulate CO₂ emissions, which has been challenged by an auto industry suit. Schwarzenegger signed legislation that would help various state agencies better coordinate ocean protection as well as regulate fisheries, cruise ship pollution, and water quality. He also collaborated with the state legislature in passing a number of air quality bills, including one that provides funding to replace older, polluting diesel engines.

He sponsored a Million Solar Homes bill to increase California’s total solar energy output from 101 megawatts to 3,000 megawatts by 2018, and ordered the state government, the largest power user, to increase its own energy efficiency by 20 percent by 2015. A 25-million-acre Sierra Nevada Conservancy was established, and the governor signed bills favored by environmental groups on pesticide drift, water quality standards for the San Francisco Bay, and allowing high-mileage hybrid vehicles in freeway carpool lanes. By executive order, Schwarzenegger inaugurated a California Hydrogen Highway Network initiative to build 200 hydrogen filling stations along California’s major freeways, linking the south to the north.

The hydrogen plan was typical of Schwarzenegger: bold, visionary, and long range, not requiring much pain in the short term. The program itself reflects his and Tamminen’s conviction (there often seems no clear way to tell the two apart) that environmental policy ought to be a kind of industrial policy, aimed at stimulating technological innovation and, through it, economic growth.

Still, the governor acknowledged to me that the Hydrogen Highways plan is as much political theater as it is policy: “selling the idea,” as he put it. “It’s a motivational thing: Build hydrogen fueling stations, because that will motivate Detroit and other manufacturers around the world. They’ll say, [California is] taking this seriously.”

In Japan last year on a promotional tour for California products and tourism, Schwarzenegger sat down with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who agreed that Japan and California should work together to realize a hydrogen economy. Although the two men made no formal agreement, the governor took this as an endorsement by Koizumi of Schwarzenegger’s Japanese-style shaping of advanced industrial development through a combination of incentives and regulation. And the governor was duly impressed when Prime Minister Edmund Stoiber of the German state of Bavaria arrived in California last year



Schwarzenegger’s support of pollution-control rules could be undercut by his appointment of a former industry lobbyist to the air resources board.

with a 50-person delegation, including “all the top industrialists in the car business. This stuff is going on,” he said, “because they all look at us as serious players, even though it’s more noise right now than actual substance. The substance will come from each station we build.”

But in that same first year, Schwarzenegger vetoed a slew of bills favored by environmentalists, including 10 that had been labeled as “job-killer” bills by the state Chamber of Commerce, and signed many bills favored by business lobbies. He let the federal Bureau of Reclamation renew 25-year farm water contracts for the gargantuan Central Valley Project at existing grossly subsidized rates without input from environmentalists.

Advocates such as Joel Reynolds, a senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), credit Terry Tamminen with maintaining open lines of communication, even in the face of strong pressures put on the governor by business lobbies and more conservative members of his administration. “He hasn’t been an apologist for Schwarzenegger,” Reynolds said of Tamminen. “He’s been fighting the good fight. And that hasn’t dimmed his stature in the governor’s eyes; he just promoted him”—from head of the state Environmental Protection Agency to cabinet secretary, overseeing the entire executive branch. Whether this move will strengthen Tamminen’s voice or distract him remains to be seen. When I spoke with Tamminen he acknowledged that it was a challenge to go from worrying about air pollution to worrying, in addition, about the prison system, health care, and law enforcement.

In any case, Tamminen’s is clearly not the only voice the governor listens to. In its 2004 environmental scorecard, the California League of Conservation Voters gave the governor only a 58 percent proenvironment score for his first year in office. (By comparison, Governor Davis received 100 percent in 2003.) Ann Notthoff, NRDC’s director of California advocacy, notes that the league’s rating looked at only one piece of the governor’s record—the bills that reached his desk. A governor is also accountable for appointments to his administration, executive orders, and legal actions. “He made solid progress during his first year by making several good appointments,” says Notthoff. “But this year has been a different story.”

Indeed, several recent developments have especially alarmed environmentalists. In July, the governor cut \$40 million from programs for coastal protection, salmon and trout restoration, and parks, among others. More troubling has been the feeling that the governor has lately caved in to business lobbies in making key appointments to state and regional regulatory boards, quasi-independent bodies that wield enormous authority in California. This summer, two appointments in particular raised flags. Ron Nehring, the San Diego GOP chairman and protégé of antitax activist Grover Norquist, was named to the state board of forestry and fire protection, in spite of his lack of expertise in either matter. Of even greater concern to environmentalists was the appointment of Cindy Tuck to the chair-

manship of the state air resources board, an 11-person commission that Notthoff calls “arguably the most influential environmental board in the country.” Tuck is a former lobbyist for the California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance, a business group that has opposed many of the major air quality measures passed in the state.

SCHWARZENEGGER'S governorship has been rife with political contradictions from the beginning. The task he set for himself of balancing competing constituencies would mean, practically speaking, giving enough goodies to each one to keep it in his coalition—or at least to not oppose him. Courting environmentalists may have been a brilliant early way to help neutralize those to the left of him on other questions, such as taxes, pensions, and education. But it couldn’t work for long, and environmentalists expect him to continue the good works throughout his tenure, not turn to soothe other anxious factions. The farther into his term he goes, the

more precarious the balancing act becomes—and the farther he has to fall if he slips off the tightrope.

These questions could all become moot in the face of a much larger problem: what appears to be a rapid process of political self-destruction, as dramatic as his ascent, and all the more startling for its seeming utter avoidability.

After his landslide victory, Schwarzenegger’s approval rating polled in the high 60s. Democrats and labor unions, still in the majority but gun-shy, realized they had to work with him. The governor, meanwhile, made good on one of his most popular campaign promises—rescinding Governor Davis’s “car tax” on motor vehicle

registrations. This added billions of dollars to the budget deficits he inherited. Schwarzenegger stubbornly resisted any new tax increases to raise revenue and instead looked to the big public-employee unions to cover the shortfall with concessions on wages and pensions. Taking an unusually (and, most observers thought, misguidedly) aggressive tack, the governor loudly called nurses, teachers, firefighters, and police officers “special interests” on TV. The unions responded with outrage and a barrage of TV ads of their own.

Sacramento slid backward from the politics of governing to full-time campaign mode. But Arnold’s playing his Terminator role after the election didn’t thrill the public or cow his opponents the way it had during the heated circus of the recall. The teachers, nurses, and cops—groups the public finds highly sympathetic—skillfully turned his rhetoric against him. By January of this year his approval rating had dropped to 59 percent. By April it had sunk to 49 percent, and most voters, even Republicans, agreed with the statement: “He should be putting more effort into working with legislators so he’d get more done.”

Instead, Schwarzenegger did the opposite, calling for the November 8 special election and infuriating his opponents. The legislature, stripped by term limits of veterans and controlled by a young, left-wing Democratic caucus led by Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez, has countered the governor’s every move with one of its



Schwarzenegger introduces cabinet secretary Terry Tamminen at the dedication of California’s first retail hydrogen fueling station, in Los Angeles. Tamminen has served as the governor’s closest adviser on environmental issues.

own—even when Schwarzenegger’s proposals have unquestioned merit, such as a bill to require schools to serve California-grown fruit, which was pettily squashed by the Democratic leadership. Indeed, the day before the San Francisco World Environment Day event, Democratic legislators in Sacramento held a press conference, attacking in advance the Schwarzenegger global warming plan for not spelling out enforceable measures. However, since the legislators essentially agreed with his goals and didn’t offer significantly different policies, the stunt got little notice.

This chaos was worrying to those people, in California and elsewhere, who had seen in Schwarzenegger’s election the best chance in years to pull the Republican Party back to the center. Just as the Schwarzenegger administration finished out a pretty good first year, it seemed as though the partisan warfare in Sacramento could stop the bipartisan environmental agenda cold.

And it is the relationship between the governor and the legislature—currently abysmal—that will ultimately determine whether progress on the environmental front continues, is stymied, or is reversed. Mary Nichols, who was resources secretary under Gray Davis, explained to me just how limited the governor’s power is: He can sign executive orders, but, “if it requires spending any money or regulating anything or enforcing anything, you still need the legislature.

“Clearly environmental interest in this state is very high, and any governor can engage the public attention and get good press and overcome other

obstacles by focusing on those issues,” Nichols continued. “I don’t think it was an accident that the global warming policy was unveiled at the same time as he was taking a beating over the special election that he’s called. It’s a way of getting people talking about something that you want them to talk about.”

While the appeal of his environmental platform to moderates and liberals helped Schwarzenegger get elected, it may not be enough to help him escape his current quagmire. A new poll released in July by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California showed that a majority of Californians supported Schwarzenegger’s policies: 69 percent favored the greenhouse gas targets he announced in San Francisco; 76 percent favored his solar energy initiative; 83 percent favored requiring carmakers to improve fuel efficiency—and 73 percent would pay more for such vehicles. But this huge support for his specific environmental policies did not translate into an overall perception that he is proenvironment: Just 32 percent of Californians polled said they liked his environmental record as a whole, while 35 percent disapproved. His overall job approval kept sinking, from a May low of 40 percent, to 34 percent in July—the same as President Bush’s. In other words, not only did the governor’s very public proenvironment stands not help him, but they didn’t even register as proenvironment. The poll data are perplexing, but they suggest that Governor Schwarzenegger, ironically, has the same problem Governor Davis did: While most Californians liked his policies, they didn’t like him.

It is equally hard to fathom the logic behind the governor’s re-

cent appointments. It may be that the more conservative members of his strategy team are counseling him, presumably against the advice of Terry Tamminen, that the moderate, proenvironment stands have cost more than they were worth and that he must make up ground with the GOP base. In California, this base isn’t religious conservatives, it’s big business—which can deliver money, though it can’t deliver votes.

IT MAY ALSO BE, sadly, simply bad judgment. Pundits have taken to calling the governor’s strategy team “the gang that can’t shoot straight” for its ineptitude and uncanny ability to misjudge the public mood. Fresh setbacks have rained on Schwarzenegger nearly weekly since the poll. A scandal erupted when the press questioned the propriety of his multimillion-dollar endorsement contracts with American Media Inc., which owns several bodybuilding magazines—publications that advertise the kinds of nutritional supplements whose regulation he vetoed. He was forced to cancel the deals. The November 8 special ballot he called hasn’t been a hit either. In the latest poll, 54 percent of the public remains opposed to the special election, and 51 percent says that the state is headed in the wrong direction.

It seems clear that Schwarzenegger is unlikely to retreat too much from, much less abandon, his environmental commitments—they are the last point of common ground he shares with majorities of both voters and legislators in Sacramento. It also seems clear that the

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Schwarzenegger saga proves again that no politician can be elected governor in California without moderate-to-liberal positions on a set of core issues, the environment foremost among them. Whoever succeeds Arnold Schwarzenegger will carry on the state’s tradition of leadership on environmental governance.

But if in the next election Schwarzenegger is thrown out in favor of a traditional, reliably green Democrat, the environmental agenda in California will certainly be less vulnerable to shifting political winds than it has been during his tenure.

On the other hand, progress on the national front might be better served if Arnold the Republican environmentalist managed to succeed: In doing so, he might weaken the core opposition of the national GOP and give environmental issues some purchase in the Red states where they are now effectively suppressed by being identified with the Democratic Party.

Arnold Schwarzenegger’s failures, as much as his successes and his progressive environmental visions, can best be explained by his determination to “govern from the center”—which has meant, in practice, taking politically expedient stands across a spectrum so wide as to be incoherent, even contradictory. In the end, we are left looking at the Hydrogen Hummer: clean and green, we are told, but still a pretty incongruous hunk of machinery. 🍂

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