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CALIFORNIA FOCUS

A downright Reaganesque speech

Governor balanced sunny optimism with candor about state's many woes



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Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's maiden State of the State speech was Reaganesque, balancing invincible optimism with a candid exposition of California's perilous finances. It appealed to our latent belief in California's limitless potential without glossing over the sacrifices necessary to regain

prosperity.

The Reagan parallels aren't accidental. It is the latest sign that Schwarzenegger may well assume Reagan's mantle as exemplar of an optimistic, pro-growth Republicanism. Schwarzenegger has always singled out Reagan as a singular object of his admiration. At his gubernatorial swearing-in, Schwarzenegger said "President Reagan spoke of America as 'the shining city on the hill.' I see California as the golden dream by the sea." In his speech Tuesday, the Terminator again drew upon the Great Communicator, saying, "President Reagan said that empires were once defined by land mass and subjugated people and military might. But America, he said, is 'an empire of ideals.' California, I believe, is an empire of hope and aspirations."

Beyond the explicit tributes, there is the very Reagan-like way in which he made his case for reform — the infectious confidence-in-the-face-of-adversity that was such a compelling characteristic of Rea-

gan, both as governor and president:

"Tonight I will talk to you about the progress that we have made, the problems we have yet to overcome, and the path we will follow to overcome them," Schwarzenegger told the solidly Democratic Legislature, going on to detail the destructive litany of overtaxation and over-regulation responsible for the current crisis. It was strongly reminiscent of Reagan's message to the majority-Democratic Congress in 1981, when he reminded them that years of high taxes and stifling regulations had produced the cruel stagflation that infected the American economy.

Back then, Reagan relentlessly reminded Congress and the people that the problem wasn't that government taxed too little, but that it spent too much. In his speech, Schwarzenegger powerfully echoed that refrain: "The fact of the matter is that we do not have a tax crisis; we do not have a budget crisis; we have a spending crisis."

Like Reagan's early days in office, Schwarzenegger's have been characterized by action. Reagan's first act upon assuming the presidency was to sign an executive order freezing federal hiring, acting on a central theme of his campaign, namely that government was too big. Arnold's first action was rescinding the illegal car tax increase, fulfilling a central promise of his gubernatorial campaign.

However, there is a particular aspect to Reagan's legacy Arnold should reject.

Like Schwarzenegger today, Rea-

gan faced an unprecedented fiscal crisis when he became governor in 1967. He responded by balancing the budget with a massive tax increase. As president, he took a similar stand in 1982, when mounting deficits caused congressional Democrats — and many Republicans — to successfully persuade Reagan to agree to another massive tax increase.

Thus far, indications are strong that Schwarzenegger will rebuff ongoing Democrat efforts to seduce, blandish and bludgeon him into committing the same mistake. While his State of the State address hailed compromise, Schwarzenegger made it clear to the Democratic Legislature that tax hikes are off the table. Such decisiveness is welcome in light of Arnold's public rumination that he might consider a tax hike if polls showed a large majority of Californians supported it, which caused Democrats to think it was only a matter of time until Schwarzenegger succumbs to their pressure campaign.

I do not pretend that Schwarzenegger is Reagan's precise ideological heir. A wide chasm separates their views on social issues. However, his State of the State address confirmed my growing belief that he could very well prove Reagan's political heir. Like Ronald Reagan standing before Congress in 1981, Arnold Schwarzenegger, in warm tones and with a smile on his face, told the Legislature that political life as they know it has changed forever. The question is how long it will take them to figure that out.