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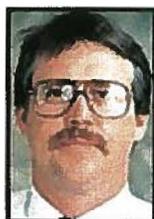
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The campaign trail turns

Last week's results could point direction for 2006

By **Timm Herdt** therdt@VenturaCountyStar.com
November 16, 2005



Between now and the June primary there may not be much on which Democratic rivals Phil Angelides and Steve Westly agree, but talking to each separately on Election Day last week, they were unanimous in this view:

The 2006 campaign for governor started the morning after the 2005 special election ended.

With that in mind, let's look through some of the rubble of the special election campaign to see what it could portend for the election year ahead.

We can start with this:

If Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and his allies thought that public employee unions were too powerful before, they haven't seen nothing yet.

The unions emerged more powerful than ever last week after beating back Proposition 75, which had been designed to undercut them.

In fighting Proposition 75, the unions formed alliances that never before existed -- most notably, one between unions representing teachers and those representing public safety workers.

If that alliance can hold together through the Democratic primary -- when it will clearly be tested by the Angelides-Westly battle -- it could

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be the dominant force in determining whether Schwarzenegger wins a second term and whether Democrats retain their stranglehold on political power in Sacramento.

Consider what happened the last two times business interests tried but failed to pass a ballot initiative to undercut labor.

In 1958, employer groups sponsored a right-to-work initiative that was soundly defeated. In the process, they mobilized labor, a development that led to the election of Pat Brown, the state's first Democratic governor in 16 years.

In 1998, business interests sponsored Proposition 226, which sought to limit labor's ability to raise political funds.

That measure lost in the spring. An energized labor community then rallied in the fall to help elect Gray Davis, who, like Brown, broke a 16-year string of GOP governors.

It remains to be seen whether the defeat of Proposition 75 will also lead to a changing of the guard in the governor's office. But it is true, as one high-ranking Republican told me last week, that when you go after an opponent but don't kill him, you only make him stronger.

Before the election, the editors and commentators of the conservative California Political Review were thinking along the same lines -- only in reverse.

"We may soon see an outcome that devastates big labor's ability to dominate state politics," wrote William Saracino.

One of the dangers of putting out a monthly political magazine that attempts to analyze results before an election is even held is that the commentary can be embarrassingly wrong.

Another writer, former state Republican Party Chairman Shawn Steel, predicted the big winner in last week's election was going to be Ventura County state Sen. Tom McClintock.

Noting that McClintock would be poised to win election as lieutenant governor next year if just a couple of the Schwarzenegger-backed initiatives passed, Steel wrote:

"This special could advance the McClintock tide for years to come."

Assemblyman Chuck DeVore wrote that "a sweep for Schwarzenegger's reforms will lead to his re-election, the election of Sen. Tom McClintock as lieutenant governor, the re-election of

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Secretary of State Bruce McPherson, as well as at least one to three other statewide constitutional officers. A loss will likely pare our strength down to one or two statewide electeds."

Fortunately for McClintock, these observations were an exercise in hyperbole. The truth is that a Schwarzenegger win wouldn't have sealed a McClintock victory, so the reality is that the loss doesn't doom him to defeat.

But it clearly doesn't help.

One person whose career prospects were enhanced by last week's vote was Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell.

A relentless campaigner, O'Connell, the former Ventura County lawmaker, took a lead role in the efforts to defeat two components of the Schwarzenegger agenda, Propositions 74 and 76.

At an election night party, California Teachers Association President Barbara Kerr looked out at an audience that included Angelides and three other state constitutional officers.

Kerr noted that she wasn't supposed to recognize them by name, but she couldn't resist praising the efforts of "that tall, skinny guy out there."

O'Connell, who stands head and shoulders taller than the others, didn't duck.

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