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[ENTERTAINMENT](#)
[HEALTH](#)
[TRAVEL](#)
[INF](#)

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## Arnold must steer clear of drift to left

BY SHAWN STEEL, Guest Columnist

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THOUGH he's served less than a full term, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has assumed at least three distinct public personas - the middle-of-the-road populist reformer, the conservative anti-government reformer, and the Republicrat populist reformer who just won re-election.

Which of those will be dominant in an administration afflicted with MPPS: Multiple Political Personalities Syndrome? Or will a new, fusion personality emerge?

As a conservative, I'm rooting for the re-emergence of Schwarzenegger circa 2005, who pledged to "blow up the boxes," eliminate the structural deficit and rein in the powerful government unions. After all, those problems haven't gone away, and in the wake of a 16-point re-election victory and the passage of his entire bond package, Schwarzenegger can make a strong case that the infrastructure crisis has been addressed and now is the time to fix the structural defects that keep state government finances in perpetual deficit.

As a co-founder of the Gray Davis recall, I'd be happy with the return of the 2003 populist-centrist who kept his promise to repeal the car tax and used his popularity and momentum to muscle legislative Democrats into passing meaningful reform of our job-killing

workers' compensation system.

But as a realist, I think it's most likely Schwarzenegger will begin his second term the same way he ended his first: as a hybrid Democratic-Republican. It is in that incarnation that he has enjoyed his greatest success as governor - if by success you mean passing legislation and earning plaudits from the mainstream media and Democratic politicians.

Schwarzenegger has already made it clear that insuring those without health insurance is going to be his top priority. Given his recent track record, that most likely means expanding the role of government in the health care system.

Recently, the governor has shown little reluctance to sign legislation imposing costly new mandates on business - witness, for example, his approval of the greenhouse gases bill and two minimum-wage increases.

Thus, I think it's unlikely Schwarzenegger will try using his massive re-election victory to make the Democratic Legislature accommodate itself to a more market-oriented health care reform. But, he could surprise us.

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Arnold endured one of the most profound political beatings ever experienced in California with last year's Big Labor \$160 million, nine-month media campaign.

He invested over \$7 million of his own money supporting important structural reforms such as ending gerrymandering and permanently controlling state spending. And, who doesn't believe Arnold isn't still smarting from all those personal attacks that would have criminalized Mother Teresa?

It would be a shame and a waste of a remarkable political comeback and re-election triumph should Arnold drift left. After all, given the left-wing nature of this Legislature, any warm body in the Governor's Office could expand the size and scope of government. But it would take a leader with vision and determination to fight for the hard-but-necessary reforms without which California government is doomed to fiscal instability and chaos.

We can only hope the governor realizes the way to historical relevance and good government lies down the latter path.

Shawn Steel is chairman of the California Club for Growth.

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