



Gizzi on Politics



By John Gizzi

The Strength of Steel

No one I ever met who was active in the California Republican Party disliked **Tim Morgan**. The Santa Cruz lawyer and Boy Scout troop leader was a friendly, sought-after fixture at state party conventions and his continued re-election as Republican National Committeeman appeared a foregone conclusion—until last week.

On February 24, by a vote of 595 to 380, Morgan was unseated as California RNC member at the state party convention. The winner was former State GOP Chairman **Shawn Steel**, who has been relatively quiet since his stormy tenure at the party helm in 2001-03.

Was there much of a difference between the competitors in the hardest-



Shawn Steel

fought battle at the San Francisco convention? Not really. Both Morgan and Steel are conservatives and the contrasts between them were largely of style: National GOP Treasurer Morgan is a soft-spoken party insider, while fellow

attorney Steel is a fire-breather whose political baptism of fire as a teenager in 1964 was painting a Los Angeles street sign that said "Coldwater Canyon" to read "Goldwater Canyon." Active in the conservative Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), Steel was finance chairman for fellow Southern California YAF leader (and best man at Steel's wedding) **Dana Rohrabacher** in his first long-shot-but-

triumphant race for Congress in 1988.

In a state party in which moderate Gov. **Arnold Schwarzenegger** does little to interfere or help, the increasingly conservative conventioners made it clear they favored Steel's more aggressive style. The former chairman had the support of 28 state legislators, 36 county chairmen, and seven former state party chairmen. Wife **Michele Steel**, a member of the State Board of Equalization, vigorously buttonholed delegates on behalf of her husband, and their daughter **Cheyenne** recruited scores of her fellow College Republicans to work the convention for her father.

Any discussion of Steel usually includes reference to the "Parsky Plan"—the controversial 2001 scheme severely diluting the power of the state party chairman that was advanced under the aegis of Los Angeles venture capitalist (and close **George W. Bush** friend) **Gerald Parsky**. While Morgan accepted and helped implement the plan, Steel (along with conservative former State Chairman **John McGraw**) was its top target.

Asked if lingering resentment toward the Parsky plan helped him in his race, Steel told me: "No, it was not part of the clash, since Parsky has not been involved in the party for a few years now. This is about a new, dynamic relationship with the RNC."

Following the balloting, true to form, Morgan graciously conceded to Steel and shook hands in front of the convention.

Death of a Patriot

Although he died at 88 back on June 21

of last year, I learned of the passing of Gen. **Gaetano Russo** only last week from his old political comrade, former Republican Rep. (1972-78) **Ron Sarasin**, who finally won the 5th District U.S. House seat in Connecticut that Russo himself had lost in 1968.

HUMAN EVENTS readers will best recall "Guy" Russo for his nationally watched crusade in 1988 to keep **Jane Fonda** from making the film *Union Street* in his hometown of Waterbury. Strongly disputing Fonda's failure to repudiate her extreme anti-Vietnam War stance and her appearances in Hanoi during the war, Russo denounced her as a "good-for-nothing" and began organizing rallies, generating letters to the editor and distributing bumper stickers that read: "I'm Not Fond'a Hanoi Jane." The movement to keep Fonda and her film crew out of Waterbury attracted support from far outside the Brass City. Russo proudly told me that "people from all 50 states



Guy Russo

and Canada and Australia" sent him money for his stickers.

Fonda insisted she would nonetheless make *Union Street* in Waterbury, and city fathers let her, noting that she and her movie crew would generate an estimated \$5 million in revenue for Waterbury. "That traitor can keep her 30 pieces of silver," snapped Russo, who went on to lead protests against Fonda during the filming.

In addition to the Fonda controversy, Russo had exciting careers in politics, business and the military. A graduate of Holy Cross University in Massachusetts (where classmates included **Bob Maheu**, later famed as a CIA agent and chief of staff to reclusive billionaire **Howard Hughes**) and the University of Connecticut Law School, Russo served with the U.S. Army in World War II and Korea. He won the Bronze Star and retired as a major general after a career in uniform that spanned 37 years.

Russo launched the Reliable Insurance Co. in 1956 and also threw himself in the fractured world of Republican politics in Waterbury. He later became Republican town chairman and, in 1968, won the GOP nomination for Congress against 1966 nominee **Romeo Petroni**. Running as a strong supporter of the U.S. military action in Vietnam, Russo lost a spirited contest to Democratic Rep. (1958-72) **John Man-**

HOW'S YOUR POLITICAL I.Q.?

1. John McCain will turn 72 on August 29, about a week before he is expected formally to be nominated for President
3. Who was the youngest person ever to be a Democratic presidential nominee?