

With Arnold In Charge, May Our Woes Be Gone

I was in San Francisco on election day and the fine Democrats I met could sense Arnoldism on the march and said they felt embarrassed by it all and I had to reassure them: A recall

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election is a beautiful thing. Chaos? What chaos? The voters got a chance to fast-forward to 2006 and click on Arnold. Why wait three years if you can cut to the chase?

Government can be such a dreary, drawn-out business, and an election is swift and dramatic. A few weeks of foot-draw and bluster and warmed-over wisdom and then the blessed day arrives and all the sweet rituals of voting and then, whammo, come the results, the shock and disbelief, the grinning and waving, and the next morning we're on to something new.

Here in Minnesota we're pleased that California has an action-hero governor, though there isn't much similarity between Arnold and our man, Jesse "The Body" Ventura. Jesse was a lone ranger, a man on a horse, and Arnold is a whole posse of Republicans. He doesn't look any more like a Republican than Barbara Boxer does, but the Republicans embraced him because he smelled like a winner, just as Time Warner embraced AOL. A merger—like the lady who went for a ride on the tiger and came back inside.

Arnold stretches the bounds of Republicanism so that it simply means the unDemocrats, the We Who Are Not Responsible for the Mess in California Party. This was good enough to get a man elected, but now comes the deluge. Now Arnold is saying that the state's budget crisis may be worse than he had thought. Welcome to government. Success in

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this line of work is short-lived. Politics consists of mostly all gas, and gas evaporates or it cools, and the beautiful balloon gets wrinkly and descends. Arnold will need to act fast lest the crisis



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worsen and he be held responsible for it. Californians are like anybody

else in that they want a great four-course dinner for \$8.95. They want to live in the Greatest State (Fine Roads, Excellent Hospitals, Best Parks, Great Schools in which All Children are Above Average) and they also want low taxes. God bless them. People in hell want ice water.

Arnold is going to have to put through an enormous tax increase while the bloom is still on his cheek, meanwhile decrying big government for all he's worth. This is a good strategy for Republicans and has worked in the past. They have created a fine reputation as fiscal conservatives so that if they get light-headed and throw money out the window, nobody holds them responsible. Leadership is not for the fainthearted. Sometimes a good leader has to charge courageously forward in full retreat.

You get elected to office by telling wonderful stories and then you do what you have to do.

When Arnold takes office, he should do exactly what he promised not to do, and then smile and say that he didn't really do it, and if he did do it, which he didn't, he didn't mean to do it, the thing that was not done, and will never do it again. We eat the cake and after we eat it, there is even more cake. Yes, we have no bananas, but we do have apples, which also are oranges. And if Arnold can be a Republican, then we're all Republicans, and we Democrats are even more so.

Garrison Keillor's latest novel, "Lose Me," was published in August. He wrote this for the Los Angeles Times.

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