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FLORIDA WEEKLY
YOUR NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE

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OPINION

Goodbye to the Governator

BY RICH LOWRY

The Governator: What a sad artifact of a bygone era that moniker is. Arnold Schwarzenegger circa the 2003 "total recall" election was going to sweep all before him as California governor, bringing the same elan and toughness he had on the big screen to fighting special interests and restoring his beloved state to competitiveness.

That was before Gov. Arnold got a severe beat-down in a November 2005 special election from the unions and Democrats (aka "girly men") he had taunted during his ascendancy. Schwarzenegger pushed four far-reaching, reformist ballot initiatives that all went down under a blizzard of spending and propaganda by California's entrenched interests. With no screenplay to save him, the much-reduced Governator simply buckled and switched sides.

His new role is as a supporting actor in the Golden State's fiscal destruction. If the future happens in California, we all should tremble at its ever-expanding debt, falling credit ratings, crushing pension obligations, suffocating regulation and rising taxes — with environmentally

preening, ill-considered restrictions on carbon emissions thrown on top. California Democrats are only slightly ahead of national Democrats, so the country's fiscal future may be in preview in Sacramento.

Gov. Schwarzenegger presided over the creation of a budget deficit worse than the one that led to his ousting of Democratic Gov. Gray Davis in 2003. The state has a \$42 billion deficit that state legislators have been holding all-night sessions to try to patch over and that sent Gov. Schwarzenegger begging to Washington for a bailout. The state has been buffeted by the housing crisis, but the ultimate cause of the mess is relentless, heedless overspending.

The politicians aren't entirely to blame. California's voters have recourse to an initiative process they have used to make responsible budgeting as hard as possible. They passed a proposition in the late 1980s that basically locked up half of state spending for the schools, no matter what. Even in November, with fiscal disaster looming, they passed another \$10 billion in bonds for high-speed rail, apparently on the theory that a state can never have enough debt.

Gov. Schwarzenegger spoke mov-

ingly during his first campaign for governor of what California meant to him, of its dynamism that fostered entrepreneurial dreams. That California is disappearing. Gov. Schwarzenegger now governs the Michigan of the West. California has the fourth-highest state unemployment rate in the nation and is routinely ranked among the worst states in its business environment. Almost 1.5 million more nonimmigrants have left the state than moved to it during the past 10 years.

Once, Gov. Schwarzenegger was supposed to be a model for a more appealing, more moderate Republican Party — socially liberal, yet fiscally conservative. All he has demonstrated is, to paraphrase Barry Goldwater, that moderation on the road to fiscal ruin is no virtue. The GOP's social liberals are overwhelmingly fiscal liberals, too — witness the party's social liberals in the Senate signing off on the stimulus bill, liberalism's proudest fiscal accomplishment since the 1970s. As for the Governator, he said *hasta la vista* long ago. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the *National Review*.

GUEST OPINION

Caring about our community is a team effort

BY BOB JANES

Lee County Commissioner, District 1

The time of opulent local spending and free-flowing cash from the deep pockets of private individuals and Lee County government is over, at least for now. Our economic recovery is a challenge for us all and it is a call to action.

Yes, the federal government is spending billions to bail out the housing, banking and auto industries. It's also spending more on the economic stimulus package for roads and bridges. Unfortunately, this will provide some work to some people, but very little monies are expected to trickle down to small businesses, independent workers and local companies.

In order for Lee County residents to make it through this trial, we need to relearn the Golden Rule. We need to think of creative solutions, work together, share, and participate in public/private partnerships.

Partnerships with private industries on a small and large scale are imperative today.

A good example locally is the Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association Inc.'s bike path on Boca Grande. The property, originally owned by CSX Railroad, was donated by the families of Bayard and Hugh Sharp to the GICIA. That organization, with the

assistance from island residents and Lee County constructed the bike path on what was formally the old railroad bed. Today, the GICIA is raising money to endow the bike path. GICIA Executive Director Misty Nichols said directors, including Lee Wesselmann, president, and Dick Mayer, vice president, are working to reach a goal of \$4 million. Since kicking off the endowment campaign in late 2007, they've raised \$3.2 million through the generous donations of island residents. The money will ensure that the path is properly maintained into perpetuity.

"Some men worship rank, some worship heroes, some worship power, some worship God, and over these ideals they dispute and cannot unite — but they all worship money."

— Mark Twain's Notebook

Cooperation like this not only builds a sense of community, but it also seems that when communities invest in their surroundings as a team, individuals take additional pride in the community asset. These facilities seem to be not only well used, but better kept.

The Homeless Coalition of Lee County may partner with private groups to combat increasing homelessness in Lee County. Private businesses are donating money, event tickets, time, volunteers and more to help assist this nonprofit agency. Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed, a land and water conservation organization, is holding a concert on March 21 to help fund its con-

servation and outdoor education programs. Private businesses sponsored the event through donations of money, time and goods for a silent auction.

We need these partners. People are hurting for jobs and services.

Private developers such as Kitson and Associates with Babcock Ranch, are slowing down. Mr. Kitson has offered Lee County more than 2,000 acres he formerly was going to develop. His company also let go several employees — all Lee County residents — just before Christmas. Bonita Bay also is laying people off and preparing to power down. They will not be advancing jobs to construction until the economy recovers. Other large employers, such as The News-Press, Chico's and Sony, have cut their staffs as well.

Partnering, and caring about our community and neighbors will make us stronger. It will make us a true community, not a transient one.

In short, money is being given and taken — rearranged in everyone's budget. In order for us to survive and thrive in this community, it will take a team effort. We need to be acting like citizens of Lee County, true investors in her long-term health and wealth, not visitors. As individuals and companies, governments and groups, we need to volunteer our time, work as community, promote private and public partnerships that protect this community, and encourage its prosperity. ■