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What's Arnold's Third Issue? How About Eminent Domain?

By Dan Schnur - State Capitol Correspondent

Arnold Schwarzenegger is less likely to raise taxes than either of the Democratic candidates for governor. He is more likely to crack down on child molesters than they are. For a conservative Republican, is that good enough?

The recent collapse of the infrastructure bond negotiations makes it clear that Schwarzenegger needs something else to motivate his party's base. When he needed rank-and-file GOP legislators to compromise for him, there was little incentive to do so. They all support him, but few were willing to sacrifice for him. The question is what can be added to Arnold's agenda that will get their blood stirring for him again.

He's promised not to raise taxes and he supports Jessica's Law. That's a decent enough start. But it looks like the governor may need one more issue in his arsenal that can get conservatives more enthused for his candidacy. What's it going to be?

Dan Walters suggests illegal immigration, but that's not going to happen. The governor seemed surprised by the public reaction to his support of the Minutemen border patrol movement last year and doesn't seem to have the appetite to go back there. Besides, the way the debate is developing in Congress, Schwarzenegger would have to come out far to the right of the White House on the issue in order to cause any excitement among Republican grassroots activists. It's hard to see Arnold taking a hard-line "bigger fences, more troops, no guest workers" position, and anything short of that creates as many problems for him as it solves.

Mimi Walters may have the answer. If you scroll down about six inches to Matt Cunningham's posting this morning, you'll see that the Orange County Assemblymember is chairing a ballot initiative campaign on the issue of eminent domain and property rights. Tom McClintock has spoken out forcefully against the ability of local government to acquire private property for the sake of economic development. So have any number of Democratic politicians representing the type of economically blighted communities most vulnerable to eminent domain claims. So not only is this an issue that can rally conservatives, but it doesn't come up with well-funded opposition attached to it the way other GOP priorities often do.

Schwarzenegger's economic conservatism has always been more of the Chamber of Commerce jobs creation variety than the property rights movement that an eminent

domain campaign would lead. But protecting property owners against the intrusion of local government is ideologically consistent with the populist/reformer image that he rode to the governor's office in 2003. We haven't seen much of Arnold the Outsider lately. Walters may be providing him with an opportunity to reclaim that mantle.

Can an eminent domain fight rally conservative voters? I'll leave that to my fellow bloggers to ponder. But it seems like a natural fit for a governor who's already reclaimed the political center and now needs one more thing to shore up his right flank.

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