

The poor republican in the race

by Debra_J_Saunders

Two very rich Republicans — former eBay CEO Meg Whitman and state Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner — are lining up to run for governor in 2010. The most money that a third Republican gubernatorial candidate, Tom Campbell, ever earned was as the dean of the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley — about \$300,000 per year. That would make him the pauper in the primary.

Campbell, however, is banking on winning based on something you don't hear GOP candidates tout much these days. Whitman is running as a CEO who could revive California just as a business-savvy troubleshooter can clean up an ailing company. As Insurance Commissioner, Poizner can run as the former Silicon Valley exec who, unlike Arnold Schwarzenegger, could walk into office with a business success story and some Sacramento experience.

With his service in Congress, the state Senate and then as Schwarzenegger's state finance director, however, Campbell told me, "I am banking on the electorate to favor experience in government."

That's some bet.

In his last statewide race, Campbell garnered a modest 37 percent of the vote in 2000 in an unsuccessful bid to unseat Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein. In 1992, Campbell lost the GOP primary for U.S. Senate.

It may be a long shot, but some political insiders wonder if Campbell could repeat the example of Gray Davis — the David who beat moneyed goliaths Al Checchi and Jane Harman to win the governor's seat in 1998. They both had money and lots of press coverage, but the most experienced candidate, Davis, won first the primary, then the general election. (Yes, I know there was this recall thing a few years later, but that's another story.)

Bob Stern, president of the Center for Governmental Studies in Los Angeles, noted that as with Davis, Campbell's only hope would be "if Poizner and Whitman knock each other off — and that's a possibility."

"Maybe competence wins out," Stern added.

Campbell's other gamble is to be The Republican who backs Proposition 1A, the spending-cap-but-it-comes-with-tax-increases measure that will be on the May 19 special election ballot. Whitman and Poizner both oppose the measure being championed by Schwarzenegger, Democratic legislative

leaders and the handful of Republicans who voted for Sacramento's most recent budget.

That's right — Campbell is supporting a measure that continues the current budget's sales tax, income tax and vehicle license fee increases for another two years. In the past, Campbell has supported measures to limit state spending — his clear preference to raising taxes. But as Campbell told me Monday, he supports Proposition 1A because he recognizes "the importance of governing; the difference between campaigning and governing. The problem the Republican Party has is: We're perceived as incapable of governing because we're inflexible. That started with social issues but it seems to be migrating toward fiscal issues, too."

Be it noted, many Republicans are sorely disappointed in Schwarzenegger — they see the governor as too flexible.

That's one explanation. The other is when Schwarzenegger did the hard part of the governing game, he tanked in the polls. He couldn't handle bad box office.

In an earlier interview, Campbell sighed as he recalled Schwarzenegger's "tremendous advantage" when he first won the recall election. The Austrian Oak "tried to do good" when he pushed for reform measures, which voters rejected in a 2005 special election. After that, Schwarzenegger's positions began to migrate.

"You have to be prepared to lose," Campbell noted.

"I've won and lost. It's OK."

Copyright 2009 Creators Syndicate, Inc.

The poor republican in the race by Debra_J_Saunders