

## Viewpoint

BY EILEEN E. PADBERG



## ELECTION THOUGHTS

Republicans blow a golden opportunity; Democrats adrift.

It was, hands down, the worst campaign for governor of California in memory with both major party candidates lacking credibility and personality. Republican Bill Simon Jr. and his team were by far the worst performers – no strategy and virtually no campaign. The Gray Davis campaign was all about how much money he could raise. In a year in which poll after poll showed the incumbent Democratic governor overwhelmingly unpopular and – thanks to a number of missteps like his handling of the energy crisis – lacking credibility, the Republican Party blew a golden opportunity. Clearly, the closer-than-expected outcome, with Davis garnering only 47 percent of the state vote, made the GOP pain that much greater. The voters showed what everyone knew – the Simon campaign only needed to run an adequate campaign, not necessarily a brilliant campaign, but they failed miserably.

The Simon loss just gives state Republican leadership another excuse to point the finger at the candidates, instead of themselves. Hello, the Republican Party is imploding, is anyone listening? If Republicans

follow true to form, they will spend the next several months lamenting the fact that their candidate was so bad (does this remind you of anything – the lashing Dan Lundgren took in 1998?). More important than finger pointing is for Republicans to ask: "What are we doing wrong?"

One mistake: The Republican Party spends a great deal of time and money trying to attract minority voters yet it fails to show concern about the thousands of women it is losing to the Democrats and Independents. In short, the gender gap is killing the GOP. Republicans need to work at bringing women back to the party.

## DEMOCRATS ADRIFT

Meanwhile, the Orange County Democratic Party continues to struggle. When it really matters, the local Democratic Party does not seem capable of raising needed money for its local candidates. This year, Tom Daly, mayor of Anaheim and clerk-recorder elect, was left hanging out there on his own. The

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Democratic Party has high-powered leadership but has yet to show that it can build a backbench and put up credible, funded candidates against Republican incumbents.

Democrats need to take a page from the Republican playbook and start recruiting, grooming and funding candidates for city council and school boards.

At the national level, Democrats ducked the war, ducked the tax cuts – and Republicans had the war and national security and an energized president. The Democratic Party needs to find its soul. Nationally, the Democratic Party is as dazed and confused as the California GOP. What do the Democrats stand for?

## VOTERS – WHERE ARE THEY?

Over the next year, politicians will try to figure out more ways to make it easier for voters to vote – regardless of accountability or possible fraud. Voting in movie theaters, in hamburger joints and yes, I've got it – in Starbucks!

It isn't about making it easier to vote – for heaven's sake, there is a polling booth practically on every corner. Voters in this country are just lazy. And don't be fooled by the excuses: "My vote doesn't count," "The campaigns were too negative," "The candidates are boring." By the end of the campaign season, voters actually believe all of this because they have heard it from the news media every day. Although I am sure that the nonvoters are at home lamenting the fact that we have schools that need fixing, kids that need educating, potholes that need fixing and criminals that need jails – the point is they don't get to gripe. If you don't vote, you don't have the right. On the very day that we should be celebrating freedom by exercising our civic voice, a small minority of our citizens makes decisions that affect all of us.

## THOSE NEGATIVE ADS

I always love this debate. "This has been the worst season for negative ads that I have ever seen." I say, "Oh, get over it! It's politics." I know that it seemed like the worst, perhaps because candidates were not talking about issues – not substantive issues, anyway. Maybe it's just that the candidates were the worst.

The thing about negative campaigning is it works because it cuts through all the ads for cereal, ice cream, toilet paper and so on. It gets attention. And if you can't get people's attention what good is an election?

Americans are bombarded with advert each moment of each and every day. Campbell Soup and Tide have huge advertising budgets and advertise constantly so that they can get attention and get us to buy their products. By contrast, campaigns have only about 30 days to get attention and to get us to buy their candidates. Campaigns are democracy in action. Enjoy them, learn from them.

Looking ahead to 2003, Democrats need to figure out what they stand for and what they are willing to fight for and the Republicans need to find a way to stop fighting about social issues and start worrying about how they are going to grow their party. It's a leadership problem all around. I'm looking. OCM

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