

Guest opinion

Redirect random energy to reinvigorate state economy

T.A. Berg

Physical science tells us that energy is never created or destroyed, it just changes form. Unharnessed, energy can be random, even meaningless. Uncontrolled, it can do a lot of damage. But if applied correctly, energy can accomplish great things -- like creating electricity that runs a hospital, for instance.

The past few weeks offer a political example of this physical law.

Recently, I was at a luncheon and found myself chatting with a Democratic local-elected official in Sacramento. She was encouraged -- even inspired -- that the governor was actually using the power of his office to tackle real issues and get things done. Then she talked about plans to organize "Democrat Women for Arnold" to raise money and to support Gov. Schwarzenegger, who happens to be a Republican.

But it was different under the dome: Later that same week, Democratic state Sen. Jackie Speier of Hillsborough complained that "The governor is trying to make the Legislature meaningless," when Schwarzenegger announced deals with key players willing to accept cuts to help balance the state budget.

Quite a contrast.

Energy without purpose

What some longtime Capitol denizens don't seem to recognize is that the Legislature has made itself meaningless -- at least to voters and the public -- by failing to accomplish anything meaningful in recent memory.

The most recent Field Poll showed less than three out of 10 Californians have a favorable impression of the Legislature, despite all its money, brains and power.

Legislative complainers don't seem to understand that the whirlwind of activity under the shiny dome is just that, a whirlwind -- lots of energy being used spinning around and around very, very fast, but never really going anywhere or accomplishing anything.

Maybe Schwarzenegger's "action, action, action" will prod the Legislature into directing its energy toward some of the many problems California faces.

Maybe it can convert some of the frenetic energy, used on legislation written by one special-interest group against another, into productive energy -- creating a local government finance structure that makes sense, producing real oversight of outdated and ineffective programs.

Putting energy to work

The governor is converting his power into action -- implementing his agenda. This could be some kind of cosmic principle -- a political version of the First Law of Thermodynamics. Power is never created or destroyed, just converted to a different form. The Legislature needs to follow suit.

In this case, the Legislature should convert the energy and power from meaningless self-promotion and political gamesmanship to problem-solving energy that will revitalize California.

T.A. Berg is president of TAB Communications Inc., a political consulting and media firm based in Sacramento.