

CANDIDATES STUMP THE STATE;
DAVIS CHEERS IMMIGRANTS, AVOIDS AMNESTY QUESTION
OTHERS ATTACK SCHWARZENEGGER

San Jose Mercury News (California)

September 21, 2003 Sunday MORNING FINAL EDITION

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Section: FRONT; Pg. 23A

Length: 936 words

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Body

Two weeks after granting illegal immigrants the right to get driver's licenses, Gov. Gray Davis waded back into the immigration debate Saturday when he praised a group lobbying for legal status for all immigrants, while refusing to say whether he supported the group's key goals.

"We should welcome immigrants. We should thank them for the hard work they do and we should do our best to accord them the dignity and respect they deserve," Davis told about 1,000 cheering people at a rally outside San Francisco City Hall, where a group of "freedom riders" was beginning a bus trip to Washington, D.C., to promote legal status for all immigrants, regardless of how they came to the country.

Avoids answering

But asked by reporters before and after the speech whether he backed an amnesty or legalization plan for immigrants who crossed the border illegally, Davis ducked the subject.

"I'm not taking positions on federal issues," Davis said, adding that he signed the driver's license bill this month because people who perform the grueling tasks of farming California's agricultural fields deserve "certain privileges" as taxpayers and contributors to the state's economy. Davis had previously vetoed versions of the bill but signed it a month before facing voters, who may decide Oct. 7 whether to recall him from office.

"I'm doing what I can as a governor. General immigration matters belong to the Congress of the United States," Davis said.

Leaders of the labor-backed "Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride" said they weren't disappointed Davis did not fully support their mission.

"We're excited he signed the driver's license bill," said Sheila Chung of the Oakland-based Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition. "We see movement on his part."

Davis' appearance before labor and Latino activists was his second of the day in front of important Democratic constituencies. Earlier, he greeted diners at Cafe Flore in the heavily gay Castro district, accompanied by Democratic U.S. Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina, the latest presidential candidate to join the governor in denouncing the recall.

Both Davis and Edwards blamed President Bush for the state's problems.

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"If you want to have a real economic recovery in 2004, there is a simple way to do that," Edwards said. "Make sure that George W. Bush gets a new job and Gray Davis keeps his job."

In Southern California, Arnold Schwarzenegger was the target of sniping from fellow Republican state Sen. Tom McClintock and Democratic Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante.

Speaking at an anti-car-tax rally near San Diego, McClintock attempted to tie the actor to the type of special-interest fundraising Schwarzenegger has been attacking.

"Look at the millions and millions of dollars that he solicited and received from major corporate interests across California after he promised that he would not," McClintock told reporters at the McClellan Buick-Pontiac-GMC dealership in Lemon Grove.

McClintock continued on that theme later in an interview on a San Diego radio station.

"The shelf life of that promise was about two weeks," he said, referring to Schwarzenegger's early statements that he wouldn't take donations. "I think an important question occurs: What's going to be the shelf life on his other campaign promises?"

McClintock, who is receiving increasing levels of support from Indian tribes with casino interests, called Schwarzenegger's refusal to take Indian money this year "hypocrisy and demagoguery" because the actor accepted tribal funds last year to help pay for his campaign on Proposition 49, the after-school-program initiative.

At the McClintock rally with about 100 supporters -- including one who carried a sign that read: "Vote Republican. Not Arnold" -- about a dozen Schwarzenegger supporters also showed up with signs of their own.

"We must be gaining if they now are going to the trouble of dispatching hecklers," McClintock said. "That's a very good sign."

Speaking to the San Diego Democratic Party, Bustamante delivered one of his sharpest attacks yet on Schwarzenegger.

Stepping up attack

"We're not going to be seen on 'Entertainment Tonight.' But governing our state is not about having a good tan either," Bustamante told the audience of about 500. "I've got some pretty bad news for Arnold: Governing isn't about grabbing the spotlight, it's about rolling up your sleeves and getting the work done."

He then zinged both Republicans.

"While Tom and Arnold were ranting and raving on talk radio, Democrats were getting things done, were making a difference," he said, citing such recently enacted legislation as financial-privacy protection, domestic-partner equality and worker's compensation reform.

Afterward, Bustamante had kind words for McClintock, calling him "a serious, passionate person" who was committed to staying in the recall campaign.

Schwarzenegger, meanwhile, appeared at a voter-registration rally in Riverside. He repeated his campaign themes of opposing the hefty car-tax increase, calling for education and worker's compensation reform, and rooting special-interest politics out of Sacramento.

"We don't want those back-room deals any more," he said. "We don't want those deals where the politicians get the money from special interests."

The actor appealed to several hundred fans and supporters to continue finding new voters before Monday's deadline to register to vote Oct. 7.

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"Go out there. Find the people and register them. Find people who never voted," he said.

Schwarzenegger's own voting record is spotty: He did not vote in five of the past 11 elections.

Notes

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THE RECALL

WHO SHOULD LEAD TO CALIFORNIA?

Mercury News Staff Writer Laura Kurtzmann contributed to this report.

Graphic

Photo;

PHOTO: PAUL SAKUMA -- ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hitting the campaign trail in San Francisco's Castro district Saturday are Gov. Gray **Davis**, right, running against the recall, and Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina, supporting **Davis** and also running for the Democratic nomination for president.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (92%); US CONGRESS (89%); GOVERNORS (89%); US PRESIDENTIAL **CANDIDATES** 2008 (86%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); ILLEGAL **IMMIGRANTS** (78%); DRIVERS LICENSES (78%); LICENSES & PERMITS (78%); US **STATE** GOVERNMENT (78%); FOREIGN LABOR (78%); VETO (78%); LOBBYING (77%); FUNDRAISING (77%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (75%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (73%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (73%); HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS (72%); US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (70%); ECONOMIC RECOVERY (66%); POLITICAL **CANDIDATES** (65%)

Company: BAY AREA INSURANCE SERVICES (53%)

Industry: DRIVERS LICENSES (78%)

Person: TOM MCCLINTOCK (79%); JOHN EDWARDS (78%); GEORGE W BUSH (58%); ARNOLD **SCHWARZENEGGER** (58%)

Geographic: SAN DIEGO, CA, USA (79%); SAN FRANCISCO, CA, USA (79%); SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, CA, USA (79%); OAKLAND, CA, USA (57%); CALIFORNIA, USA (92%); NORTH CAROLINA, USA (79%); DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, USA (79%); UNITED **STATES** (93%)

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Load-Date: August 16, 2005

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