

Opinion: Lost opportunity to unite Calif. GOP

By Mark Z. Barabak, Los Angeles Times

Arnold Schwarzenegger has a story he has often told about the lightning-strike moment he became a Republican.

He had just arrived in the United States in the roiling year 1968, with the closely fought Richard Nixon-Hubert Humphrey presidential race in full swing. He remembers watching television as a friend translated, from English to German, the back-and-forth between the two candidates. Nixon spoke of “free enterprise, getting the government off your back, lowering the taxes and strengthening the military,” Schwarzenegger recounted to cheers at the 2004 Republican National Convention. “I said to my friend, ‘What party is he?’”

“My friend said, ‘He’s a Republican.’”

“I said, ‘Then I am a Republican.’”

When Schwarzenegger entered the 2003 California gubernatorial recall race, with a surprise announcement on Jay Leno’s “Tonight Show,” it was a similar bolt from the blue. The California GOP was already well on its way to marginalization, thanks to positions on immigration, abortion and other issues that pushed the party increasingly to the right of most Californians.

But the fiscally conservative, socially liberal Schwarzenegger offered hope: to broaden the appeal of California Republicans, move the state party away from the ideological fringe and even, thanks to his celebrity and uber-personality, make the GOP seem a little less old and stodgy.

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