

Opinion: Trump may follow Schwarzenegger's lead

By Clay Russell

When newly-elected Donald Trump took his family to a restaurant for dinner without telling the public recently, the press flipped out. Journalists issued thoughtful pleas about the importance of documenting a chief executive-to-be's movements.

I'm not here to defend the president-elect's behavior or suggest that his unwillingness to play by traditional rules of engagement with the press is not a big deal. I'm a newspaper reporter, after all. Covering City Hall for the only newspaper in McComb, Miss., I hardly find it remarkable when the mayor travels the three blocks from his office to the Dinner Bell restaurant without first notifying me.

I am here instead to suggest,—from unusual personal experience—that we all should prepare for a lot more breaking of protocol.

I was the personal aide, aka Body Man, to a governor of California who was one of the five most famous people on earth. Like Donald Trump, Arnold Schwarzenegger proclaimed himself an outsider, a non-politician. His first campaign, like Trump's, was a circus, with the sheer force of his persona flattening most criticisms and every opponent.

There is of course a vast difference of scale between a president and a governor. But I believe there are lessons to be learned from Schwarzenegger's behavior as governor that will help us understand Trump's as president.

Early in the Schwarzenegger era—like Trump, even before he took office—calls of “It's always been done this way” began to

be tossed about.

One thing people didn't press the governor to do was move his family from Los Angeles to Sacramento. California was then one of just a few states with no governor's residence.

Instead he took up part-time residence in a two-bedroom hotel suite across the street from the Capitol. Several nights a week, he slept in one bedroom, I in the other. Between the manly-man Republican action hero and the 40-something gay Democrat, we were an odd couple if ever there was one.

"What must people think ... the two of us living here like this?" he said one night as he switched off the lamp in our living room before heading to his bedroom.

In 2004, Schwarzenegger agreed to speak at a Bush-Cheney fundraiser in Santa Monica. Our advance people and the California Highway Patrol team warned, "Governor, the Secret Service says you have to be there 30 minutes ahead of the president or they won't let you in. They'll shut down access."

"Relax," Arnold said, just as I heard him say several times a day for the seven years he held office. "Let's go to Starbucks."

"But Governor, the Secret Service"

"Starbucks. Do you really think they'll keep me out?" And he was right. He knew the power of his celebrity.

There is shorthand for a politician's unplanned events or stops on a tour. An OTR, or Off The Record, is an unscheduled stop. There was the OTR at an H&M store in Philadelphia, where Arnold had seen interesting scarves in the window when driving past.

"What are you doing here?" the lady behind him in the checkout line asked.

“Buying scarves.”

“Makes sense,” she said.

Then there was the Jet Ski OTR in Miami Beach. We were there for a conference on climate change but, as at most conferences, Arnold didn't attend every plenary and roundtable.

“Let's get some Jet Skis.”

“Uh, you're supposed to be in the reception at 3.”

“Relax.”

Several staff members made quick trips to the hotel gift shop for swim trunks. It had to be an odd picture, Schwarzenegger and his posse traipsing across the sand to the surf, flanked by a team of plainclothes highway patrolmen in dark suits. It happened that we were crossing a topless beach; if the rest of the posse was titillated, I was not.

More times than I can count, the governor visited construction sites or industrial facilities where hardhats were required.

“Not gonna happen,” he would say, not breaking stride, to the man waving a hardhat in front of him.

“But it's required!” By then it was too late.

He acquiesced only once in the headwear department. At Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance center in Jerusalem, a yarmulke is required when you enter the Hall of Remembrance to view the Eternal Flame. That time, the governor knew better than to quarrel.

Despite Donald Trump's thumb-your-nose approach to the traditional ways of doing things, I don't think we'll see him in H&M buying \$5 scarves or Sea-Doo-ing.

One thing we can expect from President Trump, is that “it's

always been done that way" won't get us very far. We shouldn't be surprised when he defies protocol.

After all, breaking the rules of presidential campaigns is what got him elected.

Clay Russell is a reporter for the McComb (Miss.) Enterprise-Journal and prides himself on his non-linear life path. A former professional chef, he lives with his husband and two cats in America's Deep South.