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**Bill Bradley's
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« [Bonds, Arnold Bonds \(FLASH Updates Follow, New Deadline, BIG BANG BONDS DEAL DEAD, Salvage Try Fails Also\)](#)
[The Post-Big Bang Bonds Governor's Race](#) »

Inside The Failed Bonds “Moonshot”: Arnold Fails To Clear The Trees At The End Of The Runway, Again

After another roller coaster day of fruitless negotiations, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger finally gave up the ghost on his Big Bang Bonds infrastructure package for the June California ballot around 5:30 PM yesterday. According to inside sources, he called the Democratic and Republican leaders of the Legislature to say the June bond was off. He then convened a “Big Five” meeting, consisting of himself and those legislative leaders. He also sent to the Senate and the Assembly a proposal for a \$4.15 billion bond to strengthen threatened levees around the state. No other issues were included in what had once been a massive, comprehensive, shifting plan.

Within the next few hours, according to sources, he agreed to yet another plan with Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez. This would have placed \$14.55 billion in bonds on the June ballot, \$10.4 billion for school construction and modernization, and the \$4.15 billion for levees/flood control. It would also have placed an additional education bond measure on the ballot in 2008.

For this reduced package, the Republican governor came up with the needed Republican votes in the Assembly, for the first time in this convoluted process. But with a twist, because by the time the Assembly voted, Republican members knew this latest plan was actually dead on arrival, making it a free vote to remove intense pressure to provide the governor with something for his re-election campaign.

For the Senate was having none of it. Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, according to sources, was irritated by the former action superstar backing away from what he saw as a deal last Friday when it became apparent there was no Republican support. Perata also wanted transportation spending in the plan, which is after all what most people think of when they think of infrastructure. He and other Democrats wanted environmental and “smart growth” programs. Senate Republicans didn’t like the additional borrowing. They also wanted a dam, or two, or the three which the Arnold/Nunez plan which failed yesterday did contain.

Instead of going with the latest Arnold/Fabian plan, Perata, in a move reminiscent of an older generation of legislative leaders (including some he worked with, such as Assembly Majority Leader-turned-L.A. Congressman Howard Berman), joined by Senate Republican Leader Dick Ackerman, swatted the latest contraption aside, passed a \$1 billion pay-as-you-go levee repair plan not requiring a bond on a 33-0 bipartisan vote, and adjourned the Senate until next week.

The latest version of Team Schwarzenegger had put a heavy full-court press on Republican legislators in the past two days to gain their elusive support for the Big Bang Bonds, employing not only Schwarzenegger’s own operatives but

lobbyists and fundraisers. What was the rush in the last two weeks of activity around a June bond, after months of drift in the Capitol on the infrastructure package? Arnold needs accomplishments to run on, and most of his accomplishments as governor came early on. Running in the fall with the bonds might work, but then again, he might not get the package in the midst of gubernatorial campaign maneuvering.

But the operation was backwards from the start. Instead of lining up the minimum necessary Republican votes in each house to gain the constitutionally required two-thirds vote when joined with Democratic support, i.e., two Republican senators and six Republican Assemblymembers, Team Schwarzenegger did the reverse. They went to the Democratic leaders, Perata and Nunez, to negotiate a big bonds deal, THEN tried to cajole and strong arm enough Republicans into making it happen.

For that to happen, one would have to assume that the Republican legislators, who expressed deep displeasure with the Big Bang Bonds for months, were really just faking it. They were not.

So Democratic leaders, dealing with a Republican governor who lacked the minimum necessary support in his own party to execute the deal he had struck with them, tried to help him get his own votes by adding sweeteners. At the same time, of course, they had their own interest groups and ambitions to satisfy. The result, quite unsurprisingly, was the various Rube Goldberg contraptions we have been confronting most of the last two weeks.

What was dubbed “the vote of a generation” was to be determined by legislators who didn’t really know what they were voting on, making it more than likely that, with unknown errors and unanticipated consequences inevitably shot throughout the hastily assembled plan, it would be looked back on as a massive set of expensive miscalculations.

As the day’s latest futile machinations unfolded, it was all very amusing to Democratic strategist Gale Kaufman, who as chief strategist for the Alliance for a Better California labor coalition was perhaps the principal architect of the destruction of Arnold’s “Year of Reform” agenda. **“I should go over there,” she said of Schwarzenegger’s office, “and give him a little civics book called ‘How To Make A Bill.’”**

“It may be boring to him,” she said, “but there are reasons why we have an actual legislative process. You have a bill, you have hearings, questions are asked and answered, people know what is going on and have the information to make choices. But he and his people, his new people, I should say, have not learned a thing from last year. It is the same chaotic, amateurish process we saw with all of his initiatives last year.”

IN MORE POTENTIALLY BAD NEWS FOR THE GOVERNOR, the Democratic gubernatorial campaign of eBay honcho-turned-state Controller Steve Westly released its own internal poll, saying Westly has moved to a narrow one-point lead over the Democrat widely considered the frontrunner, state Treasurer Phil Angelides. This movement in the polls is not inconsistent with a private poll I mentioned last week. Schwarzenegger and other Republicans have been anticipating a race against Angelides, a race for which they believe they are well prepared.

This entry was posted on Thursday, March 16th, 2006 at 6:46 am and is filed under [Main](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

30 Responses to “Inside The Failed Bonds “Moonshot”: Arnold Fails To Clear The Trees At The End Of The Runway, Again”

1. *Adam Says:*
[March 16th, 2006 at 7:06 am](#)

So do these positive poll numbers make Westly more cautious (is that possible?) or do they embolden him to, you know, actually lay out some detailed policy and maybe get out and campaign more than a couple of days every two or three weeks.

I wonder why these two don’t get out there, truly barnstorm, maybe combine stops with a new voter registration drive, and generate some positive excitement. Does every penny have to be spent on vapid tv ads, is that how bad