I have always found the old adage ‘Only in America’ a trifle trite. Every nation under the sun has its own idiosyncrasies and bizarre practices that other nations find at best quirky, and at worst, despicably abhorrent. I used to find it unfair that America was constantly singled-out and heckled for their nation-wide weirdness...and then I thought about it some more. Arnold Schwarzenegger fledgling political career in California is a prime example of the ‘Only in America’ phenomena. Moreover, it goes some way to show the strange forces that garner support in the political circus that is the left coast of the US ...

Here’s John Marshall with an eyewitness report on the swelling tide of Arnold...
“This guy owes me some bacon,” he said to the considered superfluous, and the resulting smog is an
minutes, which is a simple consequence of the fact trip by bus takes 180
this, I blame cars. Los Angeles may be world famous
progression from Schwarzenegger’s previous motion
been erased,” screams another. Witt
ing their sight, but given the likelihood that they would never be broadcast it unedited to the public, I felt privileged. Arnold approaches the podium. Close up on Mary, her expression genuine and passionate.
MARRY
This is the most exciting convention I have attended in my political career. The problems we are in are complicated and are due to a lack of common sense, largely due to the Davis administration, but Arnold Schwarzenegger is going to bring common sense back to Sacramento. Please welcome the next Governor of the State of California.
Deafening applause.
Arnold approaches the podium.

But when tossed by a heckler and splattered on the left shoulder of ex-actor, ex-bodybuilder and first-time candidate running for Governor of California, it holds quite a different meaning - a visual insult expressing fundamental disagreement on political issues or an impulsive disapproval of candidacy based on suspicion of political naivété.

To Arnold, it means breakfast.

The guy in a chicken suit is wearing a banner advertising the slogan “Arnold is a debate chicken.” With overt symbolism he expresses his disapproval at Arnold’s easiness in public debates and the actor’s inability to say anything in a public forum that hasn’t been scripted and rehearsed in advance. In this sense, the Join Arnold campaign forms a seemingless progression from Schwarzenegger’s previous motion pictures.

The scene is from the aftermath of the Schwarzenegger for Governor rally held an hour earlier in the Marriott Hotel Parking Lot. Initially, my goal had been to cover the actual rally itself, except having missed it, I had to settle for the aftermath. For this, I blame cars. Los Angeles may be world famous for its plastic surgery, pornography and trashy films, but it ain’t famous for its public transportation system. The trip from Westwood to LAX takes about 12 minutes by car. The same trip by bus takes 180 minutes, which is a simple consequence of the fact that everybody here drives, public transport is considered superfluous, and the resulting smog is an acceptable compromise.

But luck was on my side this day, and as I entered the Marriott Hotel just to check it out, I chanced upon the biggest Republican political event of the year that was just about to start - the California Republican Party Convention Luncheon Celebration of Republican Women’s Leadership. You would be correct to question the size of such a meeting, given that the only Republican candidates for Governor are male, but it would seem that the organizers of the event only considered this a technicality. Walking through the doors of the Marriott Hotel was like walking into a parallel universe. Inside, everybody was wearing business suits. There was a guy selling framed photos of George Bush for US$450, “Join Arnold” badges were a bargain at $1, and a person was peddling his lunch ticket for $200. The atmosphere was building as Arnold was about to deliver a speech to the Republican delegates. I asked the old man whether there was any way to hear Arnold without spending $200. “Not really,” he said. “There are cracks in the doors, but you couldn’t hear through them without an amplifier.” A skilled salesman even at 72.

I approached a “Join Arnold” stall nearby and asked them the same question. They concurred with the old man on the difficulty of eavesdropping, and so I enquired about the speech that I just missed. “Well, like, basically he talked about what’s wrong with California now and how he’s gonna fix things and stuff,” said the stall holder. And how does Arnold Without saying a word.

Dreadlocks, by comparison, are not an asset at a Conservative convention. Within seconds, I am swamped and interrogated by a swarm of suits and promptly escorted from the room. Apparently I needed a press identification pass to stay there.

Media accreditation is a relatively smaller hurdle when you are a foreigner. At the pre-registration desk they told me that accreditation had to be organized in advance, and so I was unable to see Arnold speak. But like a Jedi knight, I bent them to my will. I explained that I was a high-profile journalist from a political student magazine in New Zealand and had come all the way over here to cover this event, but sorry, no, I must’ve left my business card in the hotel suite... I have my New Zealand passport on me though. This display rewarded me with full, all-access press accreditation and a chance to see Arnold... on TV.

Film stars are more popular than politicians, and so the Imperial Room where the main proceedings were taking place was full. I settled for the overflow room, where latecomers were watching the proceedings on a size-life TV screen. Ironic to go to all this effort just to see the proceedings on television, but given the likelihood that they would never be broadcast it unedited to the public, I felt privileged.

Mary Bone introduced Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Gubernatorial Republican candidate for Governor of California, her inclusion a celebration of women in politics in the Republican Party. She was the only female speaker I saw.

Governor of California, her inclusion a celebration of women in politics in the Republican Party. She was the only female speaker I saw.
Arnold

Thank you. Thank you very much.

Deafening applause continues for three minutes.

Arnold gives "thumbs up" to the crowd and nods twice.

Arnold

Thank you to Mary Bono. This convention is a celebration of Republican women in leadership, and I think Mary Bono is a terrific embodiment of that. I believe that very soon we will have a female Governor of California... and she will be a Republican.

Applause.

Arnold

You know, a lot of people have asked me over the past few weeks, "Arnold, why are you a Republican?" So I will tell you why I am a Republican. I am a Republican because I didn’t like the impact of Communism in Austria. I wanted hope and freedom, and when I was 22 my dream came true and I came to America. When I came to America, and I remember in 1968 they had the presidential elections, and it was Humphrey against Nixon. I listened to the news coverage and what they stood for and what their policies were, and every time I listened to Nixon and he talked about opening up international trade, lowering taxes and strengthening the military – it sounded like to music to my ears.

I asked my friend, "What party is this guy from?" "Republican," he responded. "Well then I am a republican," I said.

Applause.

Arnold

I couldn’t wait to become a citizen so that I could vote republican.

Applause.

Arnold

I am a Republican because free enterprise is good and communism is evil and because Milton Friedman is right and Karl Marx is wrong. And when I hear about the Davis illegal immigrant driver’s license bill, I am a Republican because I believe in the rules of the law and not political pandering.

Applause.

Arnold

Here is what I will do. I will terminate Davis’ illegal immigrant driver’s license bill. I will go to the legislators, and if they do not repeal it, I will go to the people and we will overturn it ourselves.

I will repeal the Democrats 300% increase in car tax. I will decentralise education. I will return money to the schoolyards. And I will make sure that our environmental regulations will serve the environment and make common sense.

Like President Bush brought leadership to Washington DC, I can guarantee, I will bring leadership to Sacramento.

Next, in nothing short of a reverse of the Last Action Hero plot synopsis, Arnold walked out of the TV screen and (through the doorway) into the overflow room where I was taking notes and watching from. Another imaginative chant followed, “Ar-nold, Ar-nold, Ar-nold...”
poseurs at Venice Beach. Arnold told the LA Times this week that this had only been a joke and a publicity stunt from his earlier bodybuilding days.

They had fished something up from the 70’s referring to a gang bang with a female bodybuilder who walked naked into an outdoor gym full of poseurs at Venice Beach. Arnold told the LA Times this week that this had only been a joke and a publicity stunt from his earlier bodybuilding days.

We oppose granting to homosexuals special privileges, including marriage, domestic partner benefits, and child custody or adoption.”

While Arnold has gone out of his way in the campaign so far not to say anything, good or bad, about Tom, Tom has accused Arnold of being primarily an actor and only an amateur politician. This is a common point of criticism and has also been made by none other than Sylvester Stallone and the Dixie Chicks, but as assemblyman Ray Hanes, a Conservative stalwart, said in an NBC interview last week, “Government’s no rocket science, to be blunt. It doesn’t take a whole lot of time to figure out what is going on.”

I watched Tom’s speech in the Imperial Ballroom and the dinner function was true to its conservative roots. It began with a prayer to God and George DUBYA Bush.

And following the Lord’s Prayer it came to pass that Tony Strickland, Senator of Bush, came to speak in praise of Tom. And he approached the altar so that the Republican people might hear. And he informed the sinful masses, “I think this recall is a wonderful thing.

“Tom was the first person to talk about repealing the car tax. I believe that Tom is our best candidate. I see a lot of similarities between Ronald Reagan and Tom McClintock. You always know where he stands, from car tax to pretty much everything we believe in.”

And Tony’s praises were well received and the people rejoiced. “Go Tom Go. Go Tom Go” they cheered.

Now there was a certain man of the Republican Party of California and his name was Tom McClintock, the son of Mr and Mrs McClintock, and married heterosexual father of two. And it came to be that he accepted this invitation to preach to the sinful masses.

And Tom said, “Five years ago I started talking about abolishing car tax, and I asked voters, ‘What kind of politician would do this?’ And do you know what the response was? ‘A democrat of course, because abolishing car tax helps the working family to
good. Well, I can tell you now, the conservatives have been mugged, and they have been mugged by their state government.”

And the people cheered, “That’s right.” “Yes Tom,” they cried.

And Tom said, “I will rescind the car tax, void electricity contracts, bring workers’ costs down, and all this before lunch on the first day.

“I will decongest highways by removing the diamond lanes, make sure the highway tax is actually spent on the highways, and remove the driver’s license bill for illegal aliens.”

And the people cried, “Yes. Thank you Tom.”
And Tom said, “One of my most vivid childhood memories is of when I came home to my parents’ Thousand Oaks suburban house to find my mother sitting at the dinner table in tears. ‘Why are you crying?’ I asked her. She told me that she was crying because her taxes were so high that she was losing all of her savings to the government, and she couldn’t live the life that she wanted to. Her hopes and dreams had been stolen by the taxing system. Ever since that day, I have been committed to reducing taxes for America’s working families, to help them reach their goals.”

And the people cried, “Yeah!”

And Tom continued, “Now is the time to roll back the taxes that are choking the working class. I recall a brighter past - a California where housing was cheap, jobs were plentiful, and it took 40 minutes to get to Downtown LA from Thousand Oaks. Now it takes two hours. That California was the place where I grew up, and I want it back.”

And the people chanted, “Yeah. Go Tom Go. Go Tom Go.”

And it came to be that Tom concluded his sermon by extending an offer to the sinful masses to spend $2 of their fortune and take out their frustration at the Davis administration by stoning an Audi car with a sledgehammer. In jest, Tom claimed to have sought a French car, but without luck. And so Tom’s sermon was heard, forever and ever. Amen.

It’s now 9pm and a Republican hits an Audi hatchback with a sledgehammer, slipping over in the process, smashed glass lodging firmly into his dinner suit trousers. Panels begin to be named after Democrats and political rivals. Ironically, last week a dozen SUVs were vandalized in Downtown LA by ELF (Earth Liberation Front) in an act that any Republican would consider terrorism, yet now the Republicans themselves are destroying the very cars they are trying to protect from the dreaded car tax.

It is madness in its very essence. Removing car taxes will not solve anybody’s problems. If more people can afford to buy cars, then there will be more congestion, slower traffic, more pollution and more smog. Similarly, removing diamond lanes previously reserved for car pooling and public transport will reduce the incentives for using public transport and lead to even more congestion and further pollution.

Now these crazy Republicans are smashing a car that could’ve delivered a working family to work, wasting resources, displaying their inner destructive character (earlier they were praising the Iraq war), and making anti-French claims whilst simultaneously promoting international business and globalization.

And now for a commercial break. The following is an actual flyer distributed by Tom McClintock:

www.mmdc.info - Tom McClintock Million Dollar Clubs
Send at least $1,000 and become a million dollar club member [Go figure.]
Send at least $100 and become a member of the 10 million dollar club [Go figure again.]
Send at least $20 to become a member of the 20 million dollar club [Seems like the best value for money. Maybe it’s some witty comment that rich people tend to be more miserly with their funds?]
Make checks payable to McClintock for Governor.
Send your Investment now.

The convention ended with a series of parties, which led to endless political ‘party’ jokes. Tom invited delegates to “swing back to the Golden Era of California” with him, blatantly confirming he is living firmly in the past. On the flyer he bribery the first 300 people with a free mug. Next door, the California Grass Roots Leadership Committee offered cash prizes and free battered mushrooms to all who attended.

But the biggest party consisted of about forty uncoordinated politicos wrestling with outdated beats from AC/DC to Grease Lightning and even some mid-90s hard house. Its slogan was “Who said Republicans can’t dance?” I observed but said nothing.

Next door, a Schwarzenegger tribute party screened a marathon of action flicks. Arnold had to cancel acting in a sequel to Collateral Damage in order to fulfill his strenuous campaign schedule. But somehow I think he will be providing us with more entertainment this way.

As a foreigner, one of the most disturbing aspects of the convention was the Californians Republicans’ nightmarish obsession with cars. As Vote No First candidate William Tsangares said, “with Arnold driving a Hummer, Arianna in a hybrid and McClintock smashing an Audi, California are defining their campaigns by vehicular styles.” From car tax to driver’s licensing, the Republican campaign trail shows no promise that Los Angeles will ever be anything other than a dirty fish tank.

But the Democrats have fumbled. The Californian budget has dived from a $15 billion surplus to a $38 billion dollar deficit during their term, taxes and unemployment rates are at an all-time high and education funding is dwindling. As with most elections, voters are faced with a decision to make the best of a bad ballot list.

While Schwarzenegger faces criticism on the basis of womanizing, abortion support, comparatively few debating appearances, and political naiveté, his name recognition has given him the power to force many Republicans to abandon their backward and traditional social party lines. But like his unexpected candidacy, there’s no guarantee his campaign will have a Hollywood ending.

— Dr John Marshall is now residing in California.