

ENTERTAINMENT AND POLITICS

BY TERI PERADOTTI

The truth is most people in California have no idea what Phil Angelides' voice sounds like. The voters can't tell you if Phil is witty or if he laughs easily. They don't know about his artistic wife and how important his three daughters are in his life. The passion behind his politics remains vague. After a campaign in which millions were spent, he is as obscure and unknown to the average Californian as Evelle Younger was after his failed campaign for Governor a generation ago.

Of course, as familiar as Arnold Schwarzenegger is to all of us, we also have no idea outside of his movie making and controlled public appearances what amuses him as an individual. We have rarely seen the Governor in quiet and reflective situations or, with the exception of his early gubernatorial moments, in times when he's being challenged by someone with a differing view. As famous as he is, as powerful as he's become, the private Schwarzenegger remains private.

These two truths exist at a time when reality television has made a celebrity of folks who are watchable only because they are in the line of a camera. We know about the personal lives and habits of the American Idols, the proclivities of the housewives of Orange County, the ideas of the designers on Project Runway, and the work ethic of those who dance with the stars. There are still those who shake their head and admit with chagrin, or maybe it's dismay, that they watched him traipse naked each week on the original Survivor and remember sides of Richard Hatch that never belonged in public.

It is ridiculous that we know so much about those who are incidental, and bare incidentals about those who decide the course of the society in which we live.

We are a nation state with a slate of constitutional officers who can walk into virtually any building in California and go unnoticed.

The San Francisco Chronicle had the right idea.

The Chronicle put their editorial board meetings with the California candidates on live Internet feed, and it made for compelling viewing. The nonsense of candidates limiting the debate by only agreeing to restrictive venues or deciding who can ask what questions was cast by the wayside. The Chronicle pursued answers, and anxious to get the endorsement, the candidates engaged each other. We were the winners.

California Conversations believes we should go further.

We don't know who will take the lead with us on it—there are certainly enough qualified and imaginative journalists in Sacramento to put it together, or public television could find a niche for our suggestion of a reality show that deals up close and personal with the policymakers "Inside the Capitol."

In this case, familiarity would not breed contempt.

Californians would learn that not all politicians are alike. The quirks might or might not be endearing. It doesn't matter. They fulfill all the requirements for gossip and review. It would be a good lesson for voters to realize that our leaders are real human beings with gifts and frailties, that they are compassionate and they can be jackasses, that they direct with differing skill a staff that is informed and concerned, that they work hard, and they have values that are oftentimes just as opposite as they are honest. The pitch for the show is simply that California is being led by interesting personalities who live lives the best television tries imitating.

On a side note, it would also be nice if the only information the constituencies receive about our leaders did not come from corrosive mailers that fill our mailboxes during campaign season.

We could appreciate the fascinating and enviable drama that is our democracy.