

# Will Chris Christie Pull a Schwarzenegger?



When Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected as the Governor of California back in 2003, a lot of Republicans were excited. They had every right to be. One of their candidates winning a state-wide election in the deep-blue state of California was something many in the party never believed they'd see again in their lifetime. Sure, they understood that it was

Schwarzenegger's celebrity and not his platform of fiscally-conservative reform that won him the victory. Still, the fact that he boldly and successfully ran on such an agenda gave the GOP hope that they could use his momentum to make inroads in precincts previously thought to be a waste of their efforts. More importantly, Schwarzenegger brought something to the party that they've long been lacking: A *cool* factor.

It doesn't get any *cooler* than being an American icon after all, and that's exactly what Schwarzenegger was. In the eyes of millions, the man walked on water. *The Governator* was such an attractive concept that political activists almost immediately began seeking support to overturn the natural-born-citizen clause in the U.S. Constitution in hopes of someday getting him on a presidential ballot. The Republicans were so eager to glom onto his star power that they gave him a prominent, prime-time speaking role at the 2004 Republican National Convention. Schwarzenegger's political future seemed incredibly bright.

Surprisingly, the ride didn't last long.

Schwarzenegger called a special election in 2005 to present multiple ballot propositions to California voters, the passage of which would let him correct the vast budgetary problems that spawned his campaign in the first place. He met overwhelming resistance in the form of lobby groups and unions that spent hundreds of millions of dollars smearing both him and his agenda. Their campaign was so effective that by the time of the election, Schwarzenegger's previously high approval rating had been knocked all the way down to 37%, and every one of his propositions were soundly rejected by voters.

It was a humiliating defeat for Schwarzenegger – one that he did not take well at all. In appearances, he seemed as if his feelings had legitimately been hurt by the public turning against him. He had lost his acceptance with the masses, and it had to be an unfamiliar feeling to him. After all, he'd spent the past two decades as an incredibly popular star.

The 2005 election was a turning point for Schwarzenegger. It was the moment he seemingly decided that *being liked* was more important than saving his state from economic ruin. Instead of continuing to tell Californians what they *needed* to hear, he began telling them what they *wanted* to hear. To appease his predominately liberal electorate, he hired a chief of staff from the Democratic party, took a much softer stance on illegal immigration, began pursuing liberal causes like climate change, and pretty much abandoned all fiscal restraint. The icing on the cake was his vocal criticism of his fellow Republicans – the single respectable trait that the mainstream media can ever manage to identify when it comes to Republican politicians.

The transformation was so significant that former, left-wing critics (including San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom and actor Warren Beatty) joked that Arnold had turned into a Democrat.

From purely a popularity standpoint, Schwarzenegger got what he wanted. He once again became the toast of the town. His

approval rating rose back up and he was elected to a second term in office. Unfortunately, the price-tag for acceptance came at the cost of leaving the state in far worse condition than how he'd found it.

I can't help but notice some similarities between Schwarzenegger and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, at least when it comes to their role in the Republican party.

Like Schwarzenegger, Christie defied the odds to get elected as a Republican in a very liberal state that was dealing with a budgetary crisis. Also like Arnold, Christie's larger than life persona and bold defense of fiscally conservative principles made him an instant rock star in the party. The GOP recognized his gifts and placed him up on a pedestal, even putting a tremendous amount of pressure on him to join the presidential primary race.

Christie was clearly flattered by the GOP's persistence, but declined to run for president. He instead became a fierce advocate for Mitt Romney's campaign. He was so effective in the role that many analysts viewed him as a likely frontrunner for the vice presidency. He even seemed receptive to the idea in interviews. It wasn't to be, however. Congressman Paul Ryan eventually received the nod, and according to *The Politico*, the decision may not have sat so well with Christie. Christie was reportedly Mitt Romney's first choice for the VP slot, with some inside the governor's camp believing that he had been led on quite strongly as the likely pick.

Reviewing Christie's demeanor following the Ryan selection compels one to wonder if the governor's feelings had been hurt, similarly to how Schwarzenegger's were, back in 2005. There was definitely a tamping down of his customary praise for Romney. At the Republican National Convention, Christie's delivery came across more like a stump speech in support of his own future political aspirations than it did support for Romney or even the party platform.

Weeks later, Christie's abundance of praise for President Obama, in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, was perceived as a symbolic gesture that went beyond just a simple display of bipartisan solidarity. Christie seemed to enjoy sharing the spotlight with the president too, the association of which earned him rare accolades from the mainstream media and even his longtime musical idol (but political foe), Bruce Springsteen.

Some Republicans were not amused, citing Christie's needless bolstering of the president's image as one of the reasons Mitt Romney lost the election. While the display lost Christie some capital within the GOP, he gained some new found acceptance from the media. Whether it was due to those friendly images with the president, or his willingness to stick his thumb in the eye of his political party, coverage of him became more favorable, and not only from the press. *Saturday Night Live* invited him on for a guest appearance. Barbara Walters named him one of her *Ten Most Fascinating People* for her annual television special.

Christie earned media praise again this week when he went off on a colorful public tirade over House Speaker John Boehner's decision to dismantle a vote on a pork-filled, federal aid package for the Hurricane Sandy recovery. The condemnation was odd, especially from Christie who has made a name for himself as a champion of fiscal responsibility. For him to call into question the moral decency of a man for applying some brakes to a bill because it included billions of taxpayer dollars allocated to interests that had absolutely nothing to do with Sandy...Well, let's just say it was a bit unsettling.

I understand that *any* governor of a state obviously wants to appear to his constituency as if he's doing everything possible for them during a hard time, but there certainly seems to be a transformation going on with Christie. Just a year ago, he was the guy calling for a raise in the eligibility-age of our country's entitlement programs in order

to deal with our country's debt problem. Just a few months ago, we was the guy calling for *all* Americans to share the sacrifice of a desperately needed reduction in our government's spending levels.

*Now*, he's the guy declaring that politicians who have the nerve to display some fiscal restraint when it comes to pork-riddled legislation are "selfish" and "disgusting"? That's the kind of thing that Democrats do. Such sanctimony will earn him applause from his new admirers in the media, but as a citizen of this country who recognizes our serious economic problems and thinks there's something special in Christie, it's pretty discouraging.

My hope is that Christie is only guilty of hypocrisy, but my fear is that he's headed in the direction of Arnold Schwarzenegger – a comparison I would have never even considered just a few months ago. Wanting to be liked is natural human trait, but it takes a strong, principled leader to do the right things, even when they're not politically popular. Christie has shown bold, principled leadership thus far in his term as governor – far more than Schwarzenegger ever did. If he can manage to keep that discipline, and fight back the urge to turn into a publicity-hungry, self-righteous politician, I think he can play a far more significant role in our nation 's history than the one he's established thus far.

This country needs people like the Chris Christie of a few months ago. It doesn't need another celebrity.

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## **When Private Choices Affect**

# Public Trust

✘ “It’s his private life; it has nothing to do with being President.” This was the mantra my liberal friends chanted when President Clinton was involved with Monica Lewinsky in our House – the White House.

The choice to engage in risky behavior is a reflection on one’s character, on one’s ability to make decisions. My beliefs then remain the same today. How does one’s ability to make choices in his private life not affect his ability to make decisions in his public life? A person would have to have a split personality to say one action doesn’t affect the other.

If you’re selling shoes at Foot Locker and you’re married and carrying on with someone on the side, I would agree, your infidelity does not impact on your job of selling shoes.

But when you’re the most powerful man in the world and you choose to conduct yourself in such a manner, you open yourself up to all kinds of trouble, the least of which is blackmail.

Should we expect more from our elected officials? Should we settle for men who don’t have impulse control and act out in whatever manner they choose and subject themselves and our country to all sorts of security risks? Do we want our politicians to be driven by compulsions which overcome their reason and logic?

This week, of course, Rep. Anthony Weiner, targeted to be the next Mayor of New York City in 2013, finally [admitted](#) he sent the photo of his underwear-clad groin to a young woman, young enough to be his daughter, a 21-year old Seattle college student after a week of playing word games with the media. When he insisted his Twitter account was hacked but refused to file a police report or request a federal investigation into the matter, I knew then that he did it.

And I was right. For ten days, he lied to all of us. Can we believe anything he says now?

It's easy to say the guy's an idiot. What was he thinking? Well, the guy isn't an idiot. He's a college graduate, served on the New York City Council, and has been in the House of Representatives since 1998. His actions may be idiotic, but his pathology is far more concerning.

I'm not a psychologist so I don't have the answers. I've read it's all about the game, the risk, the power, addiction, a personality flaw, the arrogance that one won't get caught, the thinking that one is above the law. A reasonable person, at first glance, would try and understand this inexplicable behavior and think maybe Weiner's Twitter account was hacked because it just made no sense that this politically savvy, major voice for the Democrats, could be so self-destructive.

But his demons controlled him and he followed in the footsteps of many others who've succumbed to similar temptations. I doubt that he'll survive politically.

This is the last thing the Democrats want or need and it'll be interesting to see how quickly Nancy Pelosi moves on the Congressional investigation. She certainly hasn't forced his resignation and clearly hasn't "drained the swamp" of ethical violators as she promised back in 2006 now that it involves one of her own.

I guess Weiner didn't bother to read former Clinton advisor and my favorite liberal, Lanny J. Davis' book, "Truth to Tell: Tell It Early, Tell It All, Tell It Yourself." Instead he waited over a week, and probably made his public confession because [Andrew Breitbart](#), who originally broke the story and who was accused of being the hacker by the left-wing media, received photographs, chats and emails from yet another woman who's claiming an inappropriate online relationship with the Congressman.

Is it poor judgment, impulse control, power, addiction or arrogance? I haven't a clue but, in my opinion, when you've been elected to office, your actions not only affect you and your family, but the Office you hold, your constituents, and your Nation.

I'll bet money there's at least one other person in Congress right now doing something illegal/illicit/immoral that we haven't heard about yet. He, too, probably thinks he won't get caught. Think again, Gumbly, and remember, Weiner, Clinton, Craig, Sanford, Schwarzenegger, Edwards, Massa, Foley, and Lee, to name a few. It's only a matter of time.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.

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## At the Precipice

✘ When I heard Robert Duvall speaking with Mike Huckabee last year about his film, "Get Low", I knew it was my kind of movie. It's the story of a man who wants to throw his own "funeral party" while he's alive and have people come and tell stories about him and is loosely based on a true story that took place in Roane County, Tennessee in 1938.

Sounds a bit quirky but the movie is anything but. Mr. Duvall plays the main character, reclusive Felix Bush, who has lived the life of a hermit for the past 40 years on the outskirts of town. He's taunted by children who throw rocks at his windows, rumors have been spread about him and he's feared by the town folk. As the movie unfolds, we realize that it's Felix who has a very dark secret, well hidden from everyone but his friend and minister, Charlie Jackson, who has to be coaxed by Felix into attending the "funeral party" to insure his story is told if he, Felix, is unable to unload the heavy

burden himself.

Eventually, Felix's secret is uncovered. He slowly and painfully reveals to the hundreds of town folk who have assembled that, 40 years before, he fell in love with a married woman who planned to leave her husband and start a new life and family with him. A tragedy results. **Spoiler alert:** Move on to the next paragraph if you plan to watch the movie.) When she doesn't arrive at their pre-arranged meeting place, Felix goes to her home, confronts her husband, who sets fire to the lower floor of the house. Felix rushes upstairs to find his love on the floor having been beaten by her husband. The husband, who was able to make it up the stairs, attacks Felix who cannot recall if he leaped from the window or was pushed. In either event, he is emotionally destroyed because, ultimately, he was unable to save the woman he loved.

He details his shame in having even looked at the woman, who, in his words, allowed him to feel love the only time in his life. He admits that had he not done so, the tragedy would not have occurred. The guilt he felt over the past 40 years was palpable and his public confession was excruciating to watch. (Mr. Duvall's performance was superb but overlooked at this year's Academy Awards.)

I commend Mr. Duvall for having executively produced this film and bringing to the screen a story about old-fashioned ideas like shame, guilt, remorse, forgiveness and, finally, redemption.

As I watched the credits of "Get Low" roll, I thought about people similarly situated today. Do the characters in these modern-day real-life dramas feel anything – remorse, guilt, shame, humiliation? Do they ever seek forgiveness or redemption?

The latest in this long list of public offenders is, of course, Arnold Schwarzenegger, who just this week publicly

admitted to having fathered a child with a member of his household ten years ago. After serving as Governor of California and leaving office in January, he finally told his wife. He now asks the press and public to respect his wife and children. How come he didn't?

There was a time in America when any type of scandal would have and did destroy the careers of celebrities and politicians because the public was not as forgiving as today.

Celebrities and public officials like Woody Allen, Paris Hilton, Barney Frank, Roman Polanski, Al Sharpton, Jimmy Swaggart, Eliot Spitzer, John Edwards, Kobe Bryant and Kim Kardashian, all who've done shameful things, breathe a sigh of relief because, in today's America, they can continue to maintain political power or enjoy highly lucrative careers because of society's acceptance of their "indiscretions." We'll see how Arnold's career goes after this.

On the other hand, I often wonder if the average Joe actually feels the kind of regret, dishonor or embarrassment felt by the character, Felix Bush. In the real world, obviously no one is reduced to ashes because of their behavior, but lives and families are affected forever by bad behavior and are often destroyed beyond repair.

While celebrities and public officials often have no sense of shame, I'd like to think that there are those private individuals who do regret their actions and try to make amends. But for those selfish, narcissistic people who couldn't care less about the destruction they leave behind in similar circumstances, life goes on.

On good days, I have to believe there are more people in the former category than in the latter. While seeing the public offenders continue to enjoy profitable careers and acceptance by the public, the pessimist in me says we've lost the notion of right and wrong, we're circling the bowl and we're going to

Hell in a hand basket, but I'm hoping we haven't completely lost our moral sense of direction but merely on the edge of the precipice, still able to take a step back.

Bottom line: I get Felix Bush.