SPIEGEL INTERVIEW WITH GOVERNOR Â€˜ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGERâ€™

Posted on

Interview conducted by Marc Hujer

Califonia Governor Arnold Schwarzengger is satisfied with the Republican candidates, but says then we have a difficult time due to President Bush's low approval ratings. SPIEGEL spoke with him about the campaign, God and marijuana.

SPIEGEL: Governor, after seven years of George W. Bush's administration, America seems to have lost a lot of its influence in the world. The country appears depressed about how the war in Iraq has turned out, insecure about the threat from China and fearful of a coming

recession. Has America lost its beat?

SCHWARZENEGGER: No. America is strong and in very good shape. As always, Americans are able to weather the challenges that come our way because we're diverse, resilient and optimistic people. Of course important decisions need to be made in the near future in terms of rebuilding America, but that's why the nation's eyes are on the upcoming election.

SPIEGEL: It sounds like you think that with Bush, a lot of things have been neglected the past years?

SCHWARZENEGGER: The upcoming election gives us the opportunity to act on many important issues and decide what needs to be done for America's future. For example, our infrastructure is aging; we need to reform our healthcare system and our education system; we need new and innovative ways to stimulate our economy. Important questions need to be answered, like how do we reduce our dependence on fossil fuel (more…) when we know such fuel is eventually going to run out? How do we fight global warming while improving our economy? These are all issues I'm dedicated to addressing in California as well.

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SPIEGEL: America has, in the last few years, tried to lead through its military might – with a very questionable outcome.

SCHWARZENEGGER: America has a very proud military history and our troops are some of the best in the world. I think it is very important to look at how we deal with the military, how we use diplomacy and how do we make ourselves seem as though we are not just flexing our muscles because we have more weapons than anyone else. We need to be wise about that. We also need to ensure that we balance spending between military and domestic programs.

SPIEGEL: Your own party seems to be reluctant to follow your suggestions. Republicans are particularly skeptical of your healthcare reform in California. Many have derogatorily referred to it as socialism.

SCHWARZENEGGER: My approach relies on the market, which is a more Republican idea, but we try to fix the dysfunctional elements of the market because they are what makes the system a disaster for people. And I have no doubt there are many, many Republican voters who like our approach and will support it when we get it to the ballot. The polls show that's

the case.

SPIEGEL: Your plan is not much different from the one Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton – including her mandate idea – has suggested.

SCHWARZENEGGER: Everyone has to be insured, and our plan provides only a few ways you can opt out of that. We believe the insurance companies have to be responsible for insuring everybody – no matter their age or medical history. Our plan also focuses heavily on prevention and on reducing medical costs.

SPIEGEL: So you want to change emphasis from what is generally considered to be a Republican agenda to one that is more Democratic – fixing healthcare, the environment, rebuilding the infrastructure and stimulating the economy?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Not at all. These issues impact everyone regardless of political party. I don't focus on whether I'm pushing a Republican agenda versus a Democratic one – I'm pushing the people's agenda. I think next fall, voters should look at the substance of the presidential candidates' positions to ultimately make their choice in the voting booth. The economy, education, infrastructure, healthcare, energy, the environment – these are the domestic issues that need to be addressed to push America forward, and these are the issues that I'm focused on in California.

SPIEGEL: Still, it seems like your party isn't willing to follow your lead. Republicans have been extremely reluctant to jump into the fight against global warming.

SCHWARZENEGGER: There are a lot of Republicans that are for the environment and working to combat climate change. We have Governor Charlie Crist in Florida who has jumped on board and become a partner of ours. And Governor Jon Huntsman from Utah joined the Western Climate Initiative with California, Arizona, Oregon, Washington and New Mexico to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020. And in Washington D.C., the Senate recently passed an amendment that calls for a National Low Carbon Fuel Standard – modeled after California's groundbreaking Low Carbon Fuels Standard – with the support of many Republicans. You're seeing a shift. More and more people are realizing that we can both protect the environment and grow our economy, so it's becoming less and less partisan.

SPIEGEL: The Republicans running for the White House, meanwhile, are saying nothing about the environment.

SCHWARZENEGGER: That's the way that the political system works. During a primary, candidates may feel like they need to stick to issues they can sell to their party base – national security, taxes, immigration and things like that. Look at the debates. But as we move into the general election with two clear nominees, the debate opens up and you'll hear both candidates talk about everything from their view on alternative fuels to how they plan to provide more children with health insurance. That is the way the system works. The Republican candidates are trying to appeal to their base.

SPIEGEL: You mean lying.

SCHWARZENEGGER: No. And remember one thing: One of the great Republican environmentalists is Senator John McCain. He is the real deal and has been working to combat climate change for years through legislation and public awareness. And he will talk about it more if he gets nominated to run in the general election. The same with Governor Mitt Romney. Romney has actually distanced himself a little bit from his healthcare reforms – he did an extraordinary job on healthcare reform in Massachusetts, but he won't talk about it because he is worried that it is going to backfire. So there are people in the race that have all of those elements, but they won't talk about it because they want to first win the nomination.

SPIEGEL: Their biggest problem seems to be the president. Bush's approval rates are extremely low – in the mid-30s, at best. Is his presidency making it difficult for Republican candidates?

SCHWARZENEGGER: If a Republican president has a low approval rating, that has an effect on the whole Republican Party. But each of the candidates now running has generated excitement on his own merit and record. More important than the president's approval ratings may be whether or not the American people believe this country is headed in the right direction. And polls also show that the American people are not happy with the direction the administration is going. That is not good.

SPIEGEL: So have the Republicans already lost?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Oh no. They have as much of a chance to win as the Democrats. They simply have more convincing to do because people may feel like the only way they can change the direction of the country is to change the political party in the White House.

SPIEGEL: Well, they are probably right.

SCHWARZENEGGER: No, because a change in party doesn't mean a change in direction. Only a real leader can change the direction of our country. We have seen it with Congress this year. What direction have we changed since the Democrats took charge? I don't see much change at all. I believe it's all about the right leader, not the party.

SPIEGEL: It seems that Americans think this person should be Hillary Clinton. Isn't it difficult to understand why a country that longs for change after 20 years of Bushes and Clintons is about to elect another Clinton?

SCHWARZENEGGER: It is very easy to understand. A lot of it has to do with name recognition – Kennedys, Bushes, Clintons. They say, "I have heard that name." But they may have no idea what he stands for or who he is or who she is and what she stands for. When George W. Bush was on the campaign trail in 2000, there were many people at first who thought it was the old Bush who was back. They had no idea it was a new Bush.

SPIEGEL: So now it's Bill Clinton they are really going for?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Clinton. They just know the name Clinton, "Yeah, he was good, this Clinton. So let's go with her." It is the same in show business. You may go see a movie with unknown actors but probably only after you've seen a movie that features your favorite star because you believe you'll enjoy it more. You want to recognize the stars.

SPIEGEL: Will Hillary Clinton win the party's nomination?

SCHWARZENEGGER: All the indications are there that she may win, but it doesn't mean she will because, as you know in politics, things change from one minute to the next. Events cause voters' priorities to change and so sometimes candidates' support can fluctuate depending on if their record is viewed as strong or weak on those issues.

SPIEGEL: The same seems to be happening with Hillary Clinton's campaign right now. Barack Obama is seen as a symbol for change and is making a serious comeback. He is often likened to John F. Kennedy. Is that a fair comparison?

SCHWARZENEGGER: I don't think Obama can be compared to Kennedy, because he has a totally different history, totally different motivations, is a totally different person. But he is new and young and optimistic and he paints a great vision for the future of America. It gives the media an extra story to write about, a good opening line. I think that is really what it comes down to. Either way, if Hillary or Obama secures the nomination, it will be an historic moment in American politics.

SPIEGEL: Still, even if he is a media darling, can't his novelty and the promise for change he embodies carry him to the White House as it did Kennedy in 1960?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Don't forget that Kennedy's father helped pave the way for his son to get into the White House. Without him, he probably wouldn't have been there.

SPIEGEL: Your party makes a big deal out of God and the Bible. Do you pray in office?

SCHWARZENEGGER: I don't pray in office, but I pray.

"Yeah, I've smoked it, and I had a good time doing it."

SPIEGEL: How important is faith for politics? You have two candidates on the Republican side, Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney, who are talking a lot about faith. Mike Huckabee's favorite Proverb is:"Trust in the Lord, and lean not upon thine own understanding." Do you think it qualifies him to be President?

SCHWARZENEGGER: I cannot say how much he means what he says, because candidates sometimes say things to get a point across.

SPIEGEL: Imagine he meant it.

SCHWARZENEGGER: Then I would say it is a big mistake if you lead by having God guide you. I think it is important that we recognize there is a God, and I think it is great when someone lives by the Bible. I also think it is great when you have your own religion and you are a religious person. But I think you have got to keep politics and religion as far apart as possible.

SPIEGEL: You grew up in Austria and you have lived in Germany. How much do you think this experience has helped you in your political career? It is certainly a different biography than most Americans have.

SCHWARZENEGGER: I would say that you inevitably think more globally about decisions rather than relying solely on an American way of thinking. When you are in the movie business you always need a story for your film to have a universal appeal. That way, you always get the money in and become much more successful financially. I think the same is true in politics. I always check out what the world is doing – not just the US. For example, I look at what lessons we can learn from Shanghai on port security or what we can learn from the Netherlands on levees. We don't always have to reinvent the wheel.

SPIEGEL: American presidents haven't always followed that philosophy – particularly the one currently inhabiting the White House.

SCHWARZENEGGER: Whether it's for diplomacy or business or even show business, I think it's critical to learn all you can about the countries and cultures you have to interact with. It can be daunting because there is so much to know but it will increase your chance of success every time.

SPIEGEL: Obama would agree with you. He claims that having lived in Indonesia for a couple of years gives him a good perspective on foreign politics.

SCHWARZENEGGER: I totally understand that. Living overseas can show you another way of thinking and expose you to new ideas and experiences. But Hillary Clinton probably argues that she has dealt much more with leaders of foreign countries, and therefore, she is more experienced. Which experience will make a better President? I think both would be able to handle foreign policy situations.

SPIEGEL: Can a man who used illegal drugs in his youth be President of the United States?

SCHWARZENEGGER: I don't know which you mean.

SPIEGEL: Marijuana.

SCHWARZENEGGER: Marijuana. Yeah, I think so.

SPIEGEL: Even if he inhaled? Bill Clinton said he smoked marijuana but didn't inhale.

SCHWARZENEGGER: Everyone has their own way of dealing with it. I was always much more straightforward with the whole thing. I have said, "Yeah, I've smoked it, and I had a good time doing it." But I was young and I warn my kids and youth today about the dangers of doing illegal drugs.

SPIEGEL: While Hillary seems to be the clear frontrunner for the Democrats, Republicans seems to have no idea who is their best bet.

SCHWARZENEGGER: I think that people are not 100 percent happy with anyone who is running, for the Democrats or the Republicans. Sometimes when you have so many candidates, so many debates and the campaign starting earlier and earlier, voters can get fatigued by it all. So people say, "We have heard all of this stuff. I am not that excited."

SPIEGEL: Do you expect Michael Bloomberg to jump in and fill the gap? And if so, would you endorse him?

SCHWARZENEGGER: I would consider it, but I haven't endorsed anyone yet. I think that you always have to keep your mind open on everything. But right now, I am very happy with the Republican candidates we have.

SPIEGEL: Could you imagine being a cabinet member in a bi-partisan government under Hillary Clinton?

SCHWARZENEGGER: I work every day with Democrats, and I work every day with Republicans. To me, I don't see a difference. There is a difference in opinions, but I enjoy working with people that have a different opinion than I do because you can get much more accomplished. When you come together with different opinions, different backgrounds, I think you come up with better ideas, and I, for instance, welcome the combination that we have right now in Sacramento with a Democratic legislature and a Republican governor.