

**THE BLOG****T4: The Postpartisanator**

By Marty Kaplan

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“This program saved me from dying,” said Paul Culp, whose untreated bipolar disorder left him living under a Tahama County, California bridge. The program he’s talking about is the state’s Integrated Services for Homeless Adults With Serious Mental Illness, whose budget Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has just cut from \$55 million to zero. “I had that [program] to fall back on,” said Culp, who was reunited with his children after it helped him become self-supporting, “and now I don’t. Things seem to be going well, but it takes just one crisis to change that.”

This is a story about the sham of “postpartisanship,” the consequences of ideology and the underappreciated contributions of the mainstream media.

Seven weeks into a deadlock between Schwarzenegger and Republican legislators, the governor won two GOP defections and finally got his budget passed by promising to veto \$700 million from the state’s general fund. The cuts he announced last week did not include a \$45 million tax break for purchasers of yachts, planes and RVs, but they did include a model program for getting mentally ill adults off the streets via job training, housing assistance, dental care and survival skills like grocery-buying.

Anyone who has walked an American street since the Reagan era deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill has seen the consequences of loopy government-is-the-problem social Darwinism. Where smart public programs like this one in California have since gained a toe-hold, their value has been demonstrated not only in human terms, but also in hard dollars. Since November 1999, the California program has helped 13,000 people; among those enrolled at the start of this year, according to a *Los Angeles Times* article, “there were 81% fewer days of incarceration, 65% fewer days of psychiatric hospitalization and 76 fewer days of homelessness compared with their pre-enrollment days.”

The Schwarzenegger response to the pain this program’s elimination will cause? Let the counties pay for it. No matter that the counties are already ridiculously strapped. No matter that a source the governor’s Department of Finance said the counties should turn to — Proposition 63, the 1% “millionaire’s tax” designed to overhaul the state’s mental health system — is forbidden by law from being tapped to substitute for state cuts.

Earlier this summer, at a conference in Los Angeles, I heard Arnold Schwarzenegger and Mike Bloomberg extol the virtues of postpartisanship. At one panel, I listened to Sherry Lansing, whom I admire greatly, explain that she, a Democrat, came to support Schwarzenegger when she realized that if he shares her values and she agrees with him

on the issues, why shouldn't she be for him? In a Q&A after that panel, when I asked Schwarzenegger's chief of staff, postpartisan Democrat Susan Kennedy, why Democrats should overlook Schwarzenegger's campaigning in Ohio for George W. Bush, whose Iraq war is arguably the most tragic debacle in American history, she blew me off with a snarky line about Democrats' "inflexibility" and condescension for my naivete in supposing that the governor's postpartisanship might actually dampen his support for the Republicans presidential candidate. I wonder what Sherry Lansing, a tremendous champion of progressive social causes, thinks of Schwarzenegger's choice of yacht and plane buyers over bipolar victims living under bridges. I don't wonder what Susan Kennedy thinks; she's paid to think what Schwarzenegger thinks.

I didn't need to do any reporting to write this blog, but I also didn't lick the facts it contains off the wall. I took all of them from a *Los Angeles Times* article that appeared this past weekend. It was written by three *Times* staff writers: Scott Gold reporting from Los Angeles, Lee Romney reporting from San Francisco, and Evan Halper reporting from Sacramento. Two other *Times* staff writers — Jordan Rau and Jack Leonard — contributed to the article. It was the lead piece in the paper's California section, which means that the section's editor, Janet Clayton, gave five journalists the time to report that they needed and the play that the article warranted. As far as I can tell, the other mainstream media outlets that reported this veto either credited the *LATimes* or came nowhere near its depth. The *Times* is hemorrhaging revenue, circulation and staff, yet it still manages to do impressive enterprise journalism. Yes, the blogosphere also supports some terrific investigative reporters. But I ain't one of them; I'm just a *zhlub* in sweats trying to shine a spotlight on what I see in other media. An article like this — "Program for mentally ill eliminated: Before signing the budget, Schwarzenegger kills the \$55-million initiative that aids the homeless. Counties can fund it, an aide says" — is an occasion to celebrate the journalists who make a good deal of the essential but derivative *Hey! Lookit this!*ing of the blogosphere possible.

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