The 5 Meanings Of Arnold

Schwarzenegger's big win offers a guide to 2004—if you know how to interpret it, that is

By KAREN TUMULTY

IF THERE IS ONE LESSON TO BE LEARNED FROM California's wild recall, it is that there is no one lesson. At a time when other politicians hauled around briefcases full of 100-page platforms, Arnold Schwarzenegger spouted lines from his movies, gave no substantive interviews and agreed to exactly one debate, for which he knew the questions in advance. And finally, just as the know-it-alls started talking up a too-close-to-call Florida-style recount, Schwarzenegger left everyone else in the dust with 49% of the vote. Plucked from a two-part ballot and a 135-candidate field, in what was the largest turnout for a gubernatorial election in more than 20 years, Schwarzenegger's victory could only be described as a landslide.

Just about everyone who is going to face the voters 13 months from now saw something positive in the results. There are myriad theories as to what the Arnold Effect means—and most of them are true.

1 ANGER CAN BE YOUR FRIEND

The polls in California had been closed for all of seven minutes when Howard Dean issued a statement declaring that the recall had been about neither Governor Gray Davis nor Schwarzenegger but rather "the frustration so many people are feeling about the way things are going." The former Vermont Governor is not the only one who sees parallels between the antiwar fury that has propelled him to the front of the Democratic pack and the economic discontent in California. Once ignited, the anger there could not be tamed.

2 TAKE NO ONE FOR GRANTED

For Republicans across the country, there was no more heartening aspect of the election than the fact that Schwarzenegger cut deep into constituencies that Democrats regard as their own. In union households, Schwarzenegger ran roughly even with the leading Democratic contender, Lt. Governor Cruz Bustamante, and he won nearly a third of Latinos and close to 20% of African Americans.

3 CALIFORNIA DREAMING

It's probably wishful thinking for Republicans to predict that Schwarzenegger can put California—the nation's largest state—into the Republican column for Bush next year, but now they can dream a little. Although Washington Republicans stayed on the sidelines through the recall campaign, Schwarzenegger is keenly aware that they have an enormous stake in seeing him succeed.

4 THE SWING VOTER LIVES!

It has become almost an article of faith among those who follow politics that the swing voter is vanishing. But if California voters elect a Democratic Governor and 11 months later turn him out for a Republican, might you not call that a swing?

5 DON'T SNICKER

California's recall started as a partisan diversion, fueled by conservative radio hosts and a rich Republican Congressman, Darrell Issa, who was willing to spend his millions to put the question of throwing out the Governor to a vote. By Election Day, it had turned into something much bigger. California's recall suggests that with a limping economy and continued problems overseas, voters across the nation are feeling skittish and might turn to a candidate just because he promises change. Incumbents, beware. ■

Questions

1. From what traditionally Democratic constituencies did Schwarzenegger receive votes?
2. Who started the recall process in California?

LIGHTS OUT

The biggest blackout ever in North America brought out the best in millions of citizens—while exposing a woefully fragile electrical system

By NANCY GIBBS

WE LEARN MOST ABOUT POWER WHEN we lose it and are left eating cereal by candlelight on the front stoop. Or helping the waiter and the hairdresser and the deaf man direct traffic at the intersection. Or meeting an elderly neighbor for the first time when we stop to deliver some water. One woman who had lived in Manhattan for 40 years saw the Big Dipper for the first time. You could see Mars hanging over midtown.

Some cities still carry scars from past blackouts that turned into festivals of looting and despair. But it was clear that we are living in new times, when at 4:09 P.M. on Thursday, August 14, the power flickered and died in the largest blackout in North American history, and instead of exploding, the cities fell quiet.

In Toronto store owners sold bottles of water for less than the usual price; people shared cabs in the city and cell phones at the airport; and one theater company moved its performance out onto the street by the light of a pair of parked cars with their high beams on. In Harlem a group of church ladies in large hats outside a small Pentecostal church set up a card table with cups and plastic pitchers of iced tea and lemonade; they were giving drinks away.

Maybe people didn't panic because word went out so quickly from every public official from President Bush on down that there was no evidence of any kind of attack. Though officials were quick to say what hadn't happened, they were at a loss to explain what had. How can the power demands of a not unusually hot day somehow bring a huge chunk of the northeastern electrical grid crashing down? The blame cascaded as fast as the blackout. On the ground some Americans blamed Canada for its origin; Canadians returned the favor.

Experts will have to wade through 10,000 pages of log data before they can say exactly how the disaster started, but they had a pretty good idea why: the electrical system in the Northeast and Midwest consists of a lot of capacity to generate power and too few means of moving it around smoothly. Over the past 10 years, electricity demand has jumped 30%, but transmission capacity has increased only half that much. Because everything is tied together, too much strain in one place can cause the whole system to snap.

Even the experts were surprised by the speed and breadth of the failure. It began, according to experts, with an immense buckle in the system, when a still mysterious event—three transmission lines near Cleveland failing—began pulling down parts of the grid. A broken alarm at First Energy, a northern Ohio utility, may have allowed too much to go wrong before technicians noticed. The loss in power soon forced as much as 5,000 megawatts—almost enough to power Nevada for a day—that had been moving west to east to suddenly change direction. The reversal happened so fast that operators did not have time to react, and within about 10 seconds, vast sections of the grid were overwhelmed. The failed lines in Ohio started a cascade that was able to crash more than 100 power plants, including 22 nuclear plants in the U.S. and Canada, despite a structure designed specifically with such a danger in mind.

Vast amounts of money and time have gone into solving the problem of such chain reactions ever since the legendary blackout of November 1965, when an overloaded relay switch near Toronto left

30 million people without power all through New England and down to New York City. In those days, people wondered whether the Russians had attacked. That experience frightened the industry into the creation of the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC), an industry group that sets standards for the whole transmission system. The NERC set up the system for quarantining sick plants so that if one failed, it would not infect the others. The council also hoped to coordinate utilities' investments in maintaining the grid.

Whatever safety margin was built into the system has been eaten away by lack of investment in modernization. "This is the fourth catastrophic failure of the central power grid within the last decade," says Kyle Datta, managing director of the Rocky Mountain Institute's consulting practice, "and yet decision makers are not learning the right lessons from these crises." One such lesson is that it does not matter how much power you can generate if you can't deliver it reliably to people who need it.

And here a combination of market forces, political foot dragging and the reluctance of people to welcome the arrival of high-voltage lines or towers in their backyards has made it almost impossible to create a transmission system that can keep up with demand. There is little incentive for utilities to erect new towers, especially after new federal rules in the late 1980s effectively capped the return on such investments at roughly 11%.

The latest crisis looked sure to change the landscape when lawmakers return next month and take up competing versions of an energy bill that gives the NERC enforcement power and encourages states to coordinate their electricity policies in wider regions—not to mention $13 billion in goodies for the oil, gas and nuclear industries. G.O.P. Congressman Billy Tauzin, who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Committee, also

announced that it will launch an investigation into what happened.

By nightfall in many places, time seemed to be moving backward, back to the days of candlelight and carriages and cigar boxes as cash registers, when ice cream sold for a nickel a scoop. As it grew darker, many of the bars in New York City even went back to the days when people were allowed to smoke indoors, in the belief that the police had better things to worry about than enforcing the new ban. Tourists curled up on the street in Times Square, on library steps and in hotel ballrooms; city residents slept on their roofs, where it was cooler. By morning you could buy T shirts reading WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT? with the date, confirming New York's position as the capital of capitalism. Meanwhile, half a world away, the few residents of Baghdad who had electricity sat stuck to their TV sets, watching the superpower grope in the dark. "We stayed up for an hour watching it," said a taxi driver, "until the electricity shut down." ■

Questions

1. What are the most likely causes of the blackout?
2. What is NERC and why was it formed?

No-Call: On Hold

The national do-not-call list hits a snag in court

By ERIC ROSTON

FOR LOONY PUBLIC SPECTACLE, THE ON-AGAIN-off-again effort to shield Americans from unwanted telemarketing pitches rivals the California recall. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) expected to activate its do-not-call list, which is up to 50 million phone numbers, on Oct. 1. But on Tuesday an Oklahoma federal judge said the FTC lacked such authority. Politicians heard the ringing in their ears. By Thursday—faster than any bill had cleared the Capitol since the 1941 declaration of war on Japan—Congress empowered the FTC to deploy its list.

Minutes after the Senate voted, however, a second federal judge, in Denver, ruled that the no-call registry violated the First Amendment by limiting only commercial speech, leaving alone charities, pollsters and politicians. "Unpopular speech is the only kind of speech that ever needs protection," says Robert Corn-Revere, a Washington attorney who represents the industry. The Direct Marketing Association (D.M.A.) argues that a list of 60 million numbers would halve call volume, cause hundreds of thousands of job losses and lead to more jobs moving to less expensive work forces in Asia. Consumer advocates warn against overprotecting commercial speech but criticized the tele-vigilantes who bombarded the courthouses with phone calls.

The FTC indicated on Friday that it would appeal the Denver ruling. The D.M.A., meanwhile, has tried some belated image repair by encouraging its members to honor the FTC list voluntarily. More than 24 states maintain their own lists. On Friday, an appeals-court victory for the Federal Communications Commission in a similar suit encouraged the FTC to believe it will ultimately win in court. Either way, the telemarketers won't easily shrug off public ire. "All the telemarketers will have done is increase [the list's] size by 50%," said FTC chairman Timothy Muris. But the fight could take months as the courts weigh consumer-privacy claims against constitutional protections on commercial speech. For now, do-not-call remains on hold. ■

Questions

1. On what basis did a judge rule that the no-call registry violates the First Amendment?
2. What is the cartoonist's view on this issue?