



Media Reality ✓ Check

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No Labels for Gov. Gray Davis, But Recall Funder Issa Tagged as "Perfect Demon" of the "Fringe Right"

National Media Hostile to California Recall

Last night, California's Secretary of State certified an unprecedented recall election against liberal Gov. Gray Davis just months after his re-election. Republicans are split on what it means. The media are not. The recall movement is "madness," caused by "cranks."

As reporters Howard Fineman and Karen Breslau summed up in this week's *Newsweek* cover story: "So this is California: in thrall, at least for the moment, to an earnest crank and in the grip of what can only be described as a civic crackup."

The "earnest crank" is conservative Tom Costa, who runs People's Advocate, the anti-tax group that started a tax revolt with Proposition 13 in the 1970s. They noted among "contenders already angling furiously" for the governor's seat is "the loose cannon Rep. Darrell Issa, who bankrolled the recall drive." Other reporters have also signaled their distaste for the "right-wing" recall:

U.S. News & World Report writer Betsy Streisand wrote for the June 30 issue about "[Arnold] Schwarzenegger, who may be the Republicans' best hope, and Issa, who may be Davis's best hope. Davis may have found the perfect demon in Issa, whom he can portray as anti-abortion, anti-immigration, and a fringe right-wing opportunist on a power grab."

New York Times reporter John Broder described the whole recall process on July 10 as a bender with a potentially "throbbing political hangover." Broder referred to "pro-Davis forces," "Davis supporters," and the "pro-Davis camp," but never described this coalition of anti-gun groups, unions, environmental groups, and others supporting Davis as "liberal." But Issa was "conservative." Not even hard-left Green Party candidate Peter Camejo drew a label. Broder wasn't the only one to find only conservatives in California.

CBS, on both the July 8 *Evening News* and the July 21 *Early Show*, described Issa as a "conservative" without finding anyone else worth a label in the state. On the June 24 *Evening News*, they aired a clip of Gov. Davis calling it

"right-wing mischief," but nothing about left-wing failures.

NBC has been more balanced in its reporting, but a July 14 *Today* debate between recall advocate David Gilliard and California Democratic Party adviser Bob Mulholland included out-of-context attacks. In his answers, Mulholland

pounded "a man with a criminal background," "Darrell Issa with a criminal background," and "a man with a criminal background of car thefts, arson, and pulling a gun on a former woman bookkeeper." A former woman?

Couric made no attempt to correct Mulholland's attack lines. Issa was arrested decades ago on

car-theft and gun charges, but wasn't prosecuted for lack of evidence. That usually earns the adjective "innocent," not the term "criminal record." Ask Richard Jewell.

ABC has treated the recall effort with disdain and suggestions of hypocrisy and madness. On the June 14 *World News Tonight*, reporter Brian Rooney's dispatch should have carried one of those "commentary" graphics: "That Republicans would spearhead a recall over a deficit is ironic, considering that nearly every state government is in trouble and the Republican majority in Washington is running the largest deficit in the history of government."

On July 8, Peter Jennings lent his disparagement to the anti-recall cause, noting: "With a governor whose approval ratings have fallen to 20 percent, the recall is on the verge of unleashing a political tempest. Some in California would say political madness." At ABCNews.com, the *Nightline* promo copy asked: "Is the recall effort a Republican tactic to win California, or is it the best thing for the state?" There's either the state's best interest, or GOP victory. — *Tim Graham*

Gray Churchill? Newsweek Can't Be Recalled

"Davis still keeps the lights low and the air conditioning tepid in his capital offices, and when I saw him there it was like glimpsing Churchill in Whitehall during the blitz.... In a way, the energy crisis is a blessing for a man such as this: a dramatic event that imperiled everyone in the nation's largest state and that called for a detail freak with an iron butt." — Newsweek chief political correspondent Howard Fineman in a July 25, 2001 Web exclusive on MSNBC.com.

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