Bush versus Schwarzenegger: Political Economic Re-regulation and the 2003 Southern California Wildfires

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Abstract

Natural disasters provide opportunities, resources, and constraints for social agents altering their society’s mode of regulation – the rules that enable capital to function. The wildfires that struck southern California in late 2003 served this role for the regulatory goals of U.S. President George W. Bush and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. The fires enabled Bush to pursue his goal of shielding business from public interference and subsidizing it with public resources by enabling him to get his Healthy Forests Initiative enacted by Congress, though with significant modifications. Schwarzenegger’s plan, under which government would absorb costs and risks faced by capital, had mixed success due to complications introduced by the fires and resistance by Bush and others.

Introduction

In late October and early November 2003, ten wildfires burned through the forests, chaparral, and suburbs of southern California. Nearly 3000 square kilometers were burned and 22 people lost their lives during two weeks. Five counties – San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and Ventura – were declared disaster areas. With an estimated $2 billion in damage done, the fires were the most destructive in state history.

California has a reputation for being plagued by disasters, from earthquakes to droughts to wildfires (Davis 1998). The 2003 fires came on the heels of an upheaval of a political sort. California voters recalled Governor Gray Davis, who like most residents of the state is a Democrat, less than a year into his second term and put actor and bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican, into office. The recall vote was held just two weeks before the fires broke out, and Shwarzenegger was sworn in two weeks after the fires were contained. The
disaster was thus a last chance for Davis to demonstrate his skills and a tough test for the governor-elect.

The fires also brought to the forefront one of Republican President George W. Bush’s signature environmental measures: the Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI), which supporters claim will reduce the risk of wildfire. The Senate, which had stalled the HFI due to concerns raised by environmentalists, passed a version during the peak of the California fires.

It’s nothing new for natural disasters to intersect with politics. Much of the rhetoric about the politics of disasters is heavily critical, accusing one’s opponents of “politicizing” the tragedy, or of failing to respond effectively due to political ideology. This rhetoric itself, however, serves a political purpose, blocking the accused’s proposals and discrediting him or her as a heartless political opportunist. In dealing with disasters, there is no neutral, apolitical position or approach. What is needed, instead, is a clear analysis of how political forces and disaster events interact.

Much has been written on how politics impacts hazard reduction and mitigation. This paper, in contrast, will examine how a disaster event affects politics. The political economy of a state or nation is never a fixed structure. Rather, it is constantly being re-negotiated by various actors seeking to implement different visions of how the system should be run. A natural disaster is both a stage and a lever for effecting a victory of an actor’s vision. This renegotiation is carried on explicitly in debates over how emergency preparedness and response can be carried out more effectively.

The reworking of the political economy through disaster response is not limited to those elements of the social structure that directly deal with the hazard in question. Disaster politics are an element in larger governmental projects. Through successful use of the opportunities provided by a disaster, an agent can secure advantage for his or her vision of the appropriate structure, and cement that vision by institutionalizing it as a formal policy.

This paper will analyze the contrasting regulatory strategies of Bush and Schwarzenegger, two of the most significant figures in the contemporary Republican Party, insofar as they were pursued in the context of the 2003 wildfires. This focus is in part a response to the available data, as the analysis is based primarily on media reports, and the president and governor-elect predictably received far more news coverage than other figures. Further, the degree of power wielded by these two men, and by others who share their views of political economy and take cues from them, makes any insight into their operations more widely valuable.
Indeed, it is important to see them not simply as isolated “great men” but also as figureheads and shepherds of the political traditions that back them. They have the ability to greatly shape the future of California, the nation, and the Republican Party.

**The Risk Arena and Regulation Theory**

The perspective of this paper combines theoretical frameworks from two broad schools of thought – the “regulation school” of economic and resource geography, and the “risk arena” concept in risk and hazards studies. These frameworks (as I employ them here) share an affinity with the basic themes of structuration theory (e.g. Giddens 1979) seen through a somewhat poststructural reading.

Two themes in structuration are important here: the duality of structure and rules as resources. Social structure is being constantly re-created by agents. This re-creation is heavily shaped by the structural heritage of the past, but is open to re-negotiation insofar as the agent has resources at his or her disposal. These resources come from the social structure. The concept of rules as resources moves beyond the simple idea of rules or structures as constraints on action, and draws our attention to how rules give power to agents positioned to take advantage of them.

The field of risk and hazards study has tended to focus on the particular hazard at hand. Nevertheless, several authors have pointed out that outside concerns can come to dominate the hazard mitigation question. One important concept is Ortwin Renn’s (1992) idea of the “risk arena.” Renn argues that groups struggling to define an approach to dealing with a hazard operate in a sort of arena with structurally defined rules (e.g. laws prohibiting the use of force). Within this arena, they mobilize whatever resources they can – money that allows them to pay for propaganda, legal structures that allow court challenges to practices, etc. – in order to have their view of proper hazard management prevail. Renn identifies five general types of resources: money, power, social influence, value commitment, and evidence. If we group power and social influence together, this list roughly parallels Giddens’ taxonomy of allocation resources, authority resources, norms, and interpretive schemes. These resources can be applied directly to the problem at hand, or traded off against each other (for example, using money to get evidence by paying for a study).
Renn also notes that the ultimate end being pursued by actors in the risk arena may not necessarily be the management of the hazard in question. The struggle over a risk becomes a sort of surrogate for a larger struggle and an opportunity to amass resources to fight that struggle.

My analysis fills out the “risk arena” by incorporating the idea of regulation. I draw on studies of “real regulation” that have grown out of regulation theory, a perspective originally developed in economic geography. Regulation theory (e.g. Aglietta 1979, Lipietz 1988) grew out of Marxist political economy as an attempt to explain how capitalism dealt with its structural contradictions. Various regulations, or legal and cultural structures of economic practice, are implemented to shore up the system. A solution to the problem is known as a “mode of regulation,” and it allows for a certain method of amassing wealth, or “regime of accumulation,” to go on. The most famous example is the “Fordist” system of manufacturing that dominated in the advanced industrial countries following World War II. Under Fordism, capitalism achieved a temporary truce between capital and labor through the provision of well-paying blue collar jobs, which in turn increased the effective demand for products. The “regulation school” has been concerned with working out how the Fordist regime fell and how the new stage of capitalism – variously called “post-Fordism” or “flexible specialization” – seeks to safeguard the accumulation of capital.

Studies of “real regulation” (e.g. Bakker 2000, Gandy 1997, Cocklin and Blunden 1998) seek to expand regulation theory in two ways. First, they bring it down to more localized and concrete analyses by examining particular practices, especially formal government regulations, that create the overall mode of regulation. Second, they apply regulatory notions to the safeguarding of other ends besides the accumulation of economic capital – for example, a mode of regulation may ensure the survival of cultural capital that is linked to a natural resource.

The classic formulation of regulation theory has been rightly critiqued for being too static (Bakker 2000), implying a more or less fixed system operating during each regime of accumulation, staving off fatal contradictions in the logic of capitalism. This seems to be a heritage from its structuralist roots. I prefer a more poststructural or structurationist formulation, more apparent in recent regulationist work, that sees a political economic system as necessarily filled with contradictions and constantly renegotiated. Nevertheless, the central idea of the (attempted) implementation of a constellation of practices and institutions that regulate social life in order to support and safeguard a goal such as capital accumulation remains useful.
This paper will describe how George W. Bush and Arnold Schwarzenegger have attempted to mobilize the structural resources at their disposal – principally the powers granted to them by their offices and the discourses in American society that they can effectively tap into – in order to effect a reformulation of the regulation of capital. I will focus on the portion of their larger struggles that occurred in the arena opened up by the 2003 southern California fires.

**Bush vs. Schwarzenegger**

Both George W. Bush and Arnold Schwarzenegger are leaders in the Republican Party. This was a selling point for Schwarzenegger’s campaign, which claimed that his institutional and ideological connections to the Republicans who control the White House and both houses of Congress would make it easier for him to implement his promises. Bush saw Schwarzenegger as an ally – at least relative to Davis, who is a Democrat – and supported the actor’s bid for the governorship (Washington 2003).

Yet they have distinct visions of how society should be regulated. This has most often been noted in the realm of cultural issues (e.g. Meyerson 2003). Schwarzenegger supports gay rights whereas Bush insists that marriage is between a man and a woman. Schwarzenegger is pro-choice whereas Bush signed a historic ban on “partial-birth” abortion. Meyerson states “Schwarzenegger reached a tacit understanding with Republican right-wingers during his campaign: They would have to tolerate his laissez-faire attitude on cultural and sexual politics, in return for which he’d win them the governor’s mansion and adhere to their laissez-faire positions on economics” (Meyerson 2003). This is broadly true, yet it overlooks the difference in the economic strategies of the two men. Both hope to foster private enterprise, but they focus on different means.

The basic narrative of contemporary Republican economic policy is that capital is overburdened, unable to successfully pursue profit. The government’s role is to open up doors to profitable scenarios for private enterprise. Bush’s strategy is an extension of neoliberal privatization. His aim is to shift government services from the public to the private sector. This is done by opening up opportunities for private capital to take over, while providing the means and funds for such activity.
His strategy is not so much pure libertarianism or laissez-faire as it is government sponsorship of the private sector. It limits government regulation at the same time that it increases government funding. An illustrative example is the Medicare reform bill passed by Congress, in part due to aggressive lobbying by the President, this November. While most of the attention has focused on the expansion of the federal senior citizens’ health care program to include prescription drugs, the measure also includes an experimental private competition scheme. The bill would provide $12 billion to entice private insurance companies to offer seniors coverage. In 2010, the government would begin giving seniors in six pilot cities stipends that they could use to purchase either Medicare or a private plan (Dembner 2003). Thus, the provision combines a withdrawal of government control – giving up its effective monopoly on senior citizens’ health insurance – with a subsidy for the entry of private enterprise. Some critics have pointed out that the Medicare bill doesn’t put much stock in the free market if it has to pay off private companies to participate. Indeed, the point is not so much to unfetter Adam Smith’s invisible hand – though backers do hope that the plan will ultimately lighten the federal government’s burden – as it is to stoke the fires of private capital.

It’s more difficult to define the regulatory approach that Schwarzenegger is pursuing, because his political career is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, based on his campaign promises and early actions in office, I propose that within the framework of the typical Republican approach to the economy, Schwarzenegger’s focus is on the government absorption of risk. The success of this strategy would mean that capital is relieved not only of explicit constraints (laws that say “don’t do this”), but also of practical constraints imposed by the costs of business and the vagaries of the market and the environment.

Like Bush, who campaigned on and got a huge tax cut, Schwarzenegger likes low taxes, which give private enterprises more room to pursue profit. He also dislikes regulatory interference in the activity of businesses. In his campaign, he promised “to unchain business from over taxation and over regulation” (Schwarzenegger 2003a).

Yet he also hopes to maintain California’s government-provided social services. While he favors some trimming of spending in areas other than education, within days of taking office he was taking a tough line with Republican state legislators, threatening to turn to a tax hike if they didn’t back off from their more extreme proposals to cut spending programs (Nicholas and Matthews 2003b). His initial vision was altered as he took a closer look at the budget and
resorted to deeper cuts than anticipated, but it is the initial formulation that is at issue with reference to the fires and their immediate aftermath. The cuts he does favor are cost-saving measures, not calculated attempts to shift services to private providers. Compared to Bush, his desire to privatize is low.

Schwarzenegger faces a state budget projected to be in the red for the foreseeable future. His challenge, then, is to keep the state solvent without imposing additional burdens on private enterprise. These burdens could come in the form of taxes. A prominent example is the vehicle license fee, better known as the “car tax.” It was slashed in 1998 because of the budget surplus the state then enjoyed. When California’s budget began to get tight in recent years, Democrats in the state legislature looked to the car tax to make up some of the shortfall. Though Davis was initially loath to anger Republican legislators, he eventually agreed to use an administrative procedure in June to restore the tax to its original level, a move widely billed as a 300% raise in the tax (Halper 2003). Schwarzenegger promised angry voters that he would roll back Davis’s tax increase, dramatizing his promise by dropping a wrecking ball on a car at a speech in Orange County (Oldham 2003).

Burdens on capital could also come in the form of regulations that would lower the private sector’s demand on government services – for example, the relatively unrestrained development of new housing in California’s wild areas requires government expenditure on utilities and police and fire protection. Schwarzenegger hoped to be able to provide the people and businesses of California with an apparent free lunch by reorganizing the state’s debt and getting an infusion of cash from Washington.

This analysis is not meant to indicate that the actions of these two men are merely strategies for safeguarding capital accumulation. Indeed, my personal suspicion – which I lack the space to defend here – is that most participants in the politics of wildfire are on some level sincere about protecting people and the environment from catastrophic wildfire, even if they have additional agendas that come into play. The important point is that the strategies pursued by Bush and Schwarzenegger would, if successful, have the effect of contributing to certain modes of political economic regulation.

The clash of these visions – government unleashing and subsidization of capital, and removal of both explicit and practical hindrances to capital – affects both relations between the state and federal levels of the U.S. government, and between factions within the Party. The
outcome of their struggle, both in the arena of wildfire and elsewhere, will shape the regulation of the state-federal and government-private sector relationships and the vision collectively expressed by the Republican Party.

A History of the 2003 Wildfires

The history of the 2003 fires in a sense begins all the way back in April 2002. A long drought had weakened the trees in southern California’s forests, making them vulnerable to bark beetles. Seeing in the acres of beetle-killed trees the possibility of a catastrophic wildfire, San Bernardino County officials declared a state of emergency in order to expedite the removal of this potential fuel. They wrote to Governor Davis, asking him to also declare a state of emergency in the county, which would free up state aid for the hazard mitigation. The following month Davis declined the request, saying that the risk was not great enough and that there were no funds available. In October of that year the county asked again, also requesting that Davis petition President Bush for a declaration of emergency from the federal level. Again Davis said no, arguing that the state still lacked the money and that a federal state of emergency could not be applied to a potential disaster (Coille and Saladay 2003, Pollack 2003).

In March of 2003, Davis granted a third request and declared a state of emergency in San Diego, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties due to the fire hazard presented by the trees killed by beetles and drought. He also sent a request to the White House for a federal declaration of a state of emergency in those counties. The letter asked for $430 million to carry out fuel reduction. He would later explain this change of heart as a result of the doubling in affected area between October and March (Coille and Saladay 2003).

Bush had announced the HFI in August 2002, following destructive fires elsewhere in the west (Bush 2002b). In May 2003, the House of Representatives passed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) by a vote of 257-170 (Coile 2003).

While waiting to hear from Washington, California received two grants of fire money. In August, Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman toured San Bernardino National Forest and promised $5 million for fuel reduction (Pollack 2003). The following month, Congress gave the state $30 million for tree removal (Boxall and Polakovic 2003).
During this time, the big story out of California was not wildfire, but wild politics. California’s constitution provides for citizens to recall and replace the governor, though no governor had previously been recalled. An effort largely financed by Republican Representative Darrell Issa succeeded in setting an election for October 7. A slate of 135 candidates made it onto the ballot, but the most talked-about was Schwarzenegger, who announced his candidacy during an appearance on *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno on August 6 (Sanchez and Eds 2003). Schwarzenegger rode out a last-minute eruption of allegations that he had groped several women. The final count was 55.4% in favor of recalling Davis and 48.6% in favor of Schwarzenegger becoming the new governor, with Democratic runner-up Cruz Bustamante at 31.5% (Shelley 2003).

On October 24 the Bush administration finally turned down Davis’s request for a state of emergency, citing – as Davis had warned – the principle that a state of emergency could only be declared after a disaster had struck (Jones and Morain 2003).

By that time, the fires were already beginning. On October 21, two fires were burning in southern California. In San Bernardino National Forest near the Hunter’s Ridge subdivision, the Grand Prix fire came to life. At present it is suspected to have been started by an arsonist. The Roblar fire began at Camp Pendleton, near San Diego. The fire’s cause is presently unknown, though at the time it was thought to have been set off by artillery exercises. Two days later, the Piru fire began near Val Verde, in Ventura County (Associated Press 2003).

On October 24, the hot, dry Santa Ana winds were blowing down out of the mountains, driving flame and smoke westward toward the heavily populated coast. The winds, combined with the rough topography, made the blaze nearly impossible for firefighters to control, grounding aerial support and forcing ground crews into a defensive posture. Smoke led authorities to close Interstates 15 and 215. The fire advanced toward homes in suburbs like Fontana and Rancho Cucamonga, from which 3000 people were evacuated (Sanchez 2003). In Los Angeles County, the Verdale fire began, possibly due to arson (Associated Press 2003). The scale of the fires was beginning to attract serious national attention. Back in Washington DC, House Resources Committee Chair and Republican California Representative Richard Pombo urged his colleagues in the Senate to “wake up and smell the smoke” and pass the HFRA (Coile 2003). The Senate version had been stalled because some legislators – mostly Democrats –
agreed with criticisms of the measure put forward by environmentalists and insisted on further debate and amendments.

A letup in the Santa Ana winds in some areas aided firefighters on October 25, allowing them to do some backburning and directing the Piru fire towards uninhabited areas. Some residents of Rancho Cucamonga returned home (Associated Press 2003b). Two small fires in Los Angeles and Riverside Counties were contained. Yet despite these advances, the day was to prove devastating. Around 9:00 a.m., two men in a grey van were seen flicking cigarette ashes out the window, starting what would become the Old fire in San Bernardino County. Authorities evacuated residents near the rapidly-growing Old fire and closed amenities like San Bernardino National Forest, several Indian casinos, and Route 330. San Bernardino County officials asked the state to declare a state of emergency. Two elderly men were reported dead, the fire’s first casualties (Wilson, Pugmire, and Morin 2003).

By this time, California’s firefighting resources were maxed out. But there was more to come. In the afternoon, a fire blazed to life in Simi Valley, near the border between Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. Around 5:30 Sergio Martinez, a hunter who had gotten lost in Cleveland National Forest in San Diego County, lit signal fire. While the fire succeeded in getting Martinez rescued, it also burned out of control and became the huge Cedar fire (Broder 2003a). The Cedar fire advanced on San Diego, which had sent most of its comparatively small firefighting resources north to fight the fires in the Los Angeles area and was unable, due to a procedural rule, to recall them to fight the danger closer to home.

The following day, Davis announced a state of emergency for San Bernardino, San Diego, Los Angeles, and Ventura Counties (Sanchez 2003b). He asked for federal assistance for people who had lost their homes and requested a visit from FEMA chief Michael D. Brown (Salladay and Sebastian 2003). The Santa Ana winds kicked up again, grounding aircraft and fanning the flames that were moving hungrily into the beetle-infested trees. In San Diego, the Federal Aviation Administration control center was disrupted by smoke and operations were shifted to Arizona. Flights in and out of Los Angeles were grounded or delayed. Fifty thousand people were evacuated and as many as 13 dead by day’s end (Kasindorf 2003). Seven of the deaths came as fire raced through Wildcat Canyon on Barona Ranch Indian Reservation (Gaither 2003).
Three more fires started this day: the Paradise fire near Valley Center in San Diego County, the Mountain fire in the Sage area of Riverside County, and the Mine fire near Otay Mountain in San Diego County. The Old fire and the Grand Prix fire merged, forming a 27-kilometer fire front with flames 50 meters high (Associated Press 2003).

On October 27, the federal government responded. Brown arrived to survey the damage. Bush declared the four counties to be disaster areas and pledged aid, saying, “The federal government will provide all resources necessary at the request of the state to work and fight these fires. We want to help put them out. This is a devastating fire and we’re prepared to help in any way we can” (Ayres 2003). Meanwhile, Davis was looking to other states and the military for help. He requested 50 engines and crews from Arizona and Nevada and called up the National Guard (Sanchez 2003c). State and local officials criticized red tape for holding up firefighting funds, and Davis for not using military aircraft sooner (Wilson, Pfeifer, and Landsberg 2003).

The Santa Ana winds eased up in some areas, allowing the use of aircraft and the beginning of offensive containment operations. Air traffic resumed operations. The Cedar fire gutted the towns of Crest and Harbison Canyon, while fire advanced on Mount Baldy and Lake Arrowhead. Residents of Rancho Cucamonga, San Antonio Heights, Upland, and Rialto returned home. A major power line from Arizona to San Diego County was brought down by the fire, but conservation and the reduced energy demand from areas that had been evacuated prevented blackouts (Brooks 2003).

Schwarzenegger toured Simi Valley, contrasting his pretend heroism in movies to the real heroism of the firefighters and announcing that “the key thing is to get the federal money and help these people get their lives back together.” This, he said, would be the focus of his previously scheduled trip to Washington the next day. Davis was at Scripps Ranch and Tierrasanta, which he compared to the war zones he had seen in Vietnam (Sanchez 2003c).

In Washington, Democratic California Senator Dianne Feinstein cited the California fires in a plea for the Senate to act on the HFRA. The Senate version of the bill was judged better than the House version but still lacking by environmentalists, who feared that the fires would be used to push the passage of a bad law (Coile 2003).

On October 28, the town of Cuyamaca in San Diego County was leveled by fire. Firefighters cut a firebreak to defend the nearby town of Julian. Sea breezes, reversing the hot, dry Santa Anas, helped firefighters in the Los Angeles area but complicated efforts in the
mountains (Sanchez 2003d). Firefighting organizers began to send some firefighters home because they were too exhausted from a week of strenuous efforts (Associated Press 2003c). Seven-year veteran U.S. Forest Service firefighter Damien Sanchez said “This is some of the most stressful firefighting I’ve done” (Seattle Times 2003) As smaller fires came under control, resources were shifted to the Cedar fire, which had become the largest in state history. Out-of-state firefighters began arriving, helping to boost the forces arrayed against the Cedar fire by 50%. The power line from Arizona was restored (Fox, Kelley, and Perry 2003).

Department of Homeland Security Undersecretary Michael Brown announced the beginning of federal aid for homeowners and businesses (Kasindorf 2003). San Diego County announced that building permit fees would be waived for people rebuilding structures that had burned down. Davis signed an executive order temporarily suspending tax collection from property damaged in the fire. He responded to critics by saying that military aircraft would have been useless earlier because of the high winds (Salladay and Sebastian 2003). Officials announced that fire deaths would be considered homicides and issued a $50,000 reward for information leading to the capture of arsonists (Fox, Kelley, and Perry 2003).

The House and Senate agreed to add $500 million for firefighting in California and elsewhere to the $87 billion appropriation for military and reconstruction operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Schwarzenegger met with Congressional and FEMA officials. He requested that FEMA set up one-stop centers for disaster relief, a move that Davis had urged. A FEMA spokesman replied that the federal government was already looking for sites for such centers and would pay the standard three quarters of firefighting costs as well as making grants to the hardest-hit areas. Beyond that, he said, “There are no additional resources to be made available” (Coile 2003b).

October 29 saw continued battles to save several suburbs, most notably Julian, Arrowhead, and Stevenson Ranch. The town of Cedar Glen was not so lucky, as fire swept through it (Hanley, Tempest, and Becerra 2003). Firefighter Steve Rucker was killed, the only firefighter casualty of the southern California fires (Sanchez 2003e).

Schwarzenegger said of his visit to the nation’s capital, “I came to Washington basically to establish relationships and make sure we’re getting more federal money.” He announced that FEMA would open six one-stop centers in southern California (Stone 2003).
The tide began to turn on October 30, as a light rain – 1/100th of an inch fell in Los Angeles, the first measurable rainfall in months – and cooling temperatures took some of the power out of the fires (Rubin, Wilson, and Covarrubias 2003). San Bernardino County Supervisor Dennis Hansberger said “I think Mother Nature changed teams and got on our side today.” Fires were turned back from Los Angeles, Julian, Lake Arrowhead, and Stevenson Ranch (Sanchez 2003f). The Cedar fire turned toward the sparsely inhabited desert, allowing firefighters to shift into “recovery” mode (Rubin, Wilson, and Covarrubias 2003).

Schwarzenegger was faced with calls to change his mind about lowering the car tax, which critics pointed out goes to fund firefighting. He said that he wouldn’t think about that until after the fires were out (Nicholas and Halper 2003). Davis issued an executive order promising that the state would reimburse local governments for firefighting expenses (Pringle 2003).

Turning down last-minute amendments that would have increased judicial review of fire prevention measures, increased fire funding, and increased the proportion of work that had to be done near settled areas, the Senate voted 80-14 for its version of the HFRA. Though the Senate text differed in significant ways from the House version and from Bush’s original proposal, the President said he would sign either bill (Stolberg 2003). Schwarzenegger spoke with Vice President Dick Cheney about getting more funds for California, but then cut his visit to the capital short in order to return to the scene of the fires (Sanchez 2003f).

On the last day of the month, big gains were made in getting all of the fires under control, and firefighters began cutting a firebreak to protect Big Bear Lake (Associated Press 2003).

Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge visited Scripps Ranch (McDonald, Santana, and Jimenez 2003). Davis promised to work “hand in glove” with Schwarzenegger, but warned that a tax increase would be necessary if the federal government didn’t pay 100% of the firefighting costs (Fimrite et al. 2003). Both the governor and governor-elect rejected finger-pointing over the delay in clearing away the trees killed by beetles, but agreed to appeal the rejection of Davis’s request for funds (Coile and Salladay 2003).

Though the fires were not out as November began, post-fire activity got underway. A landslide cut off Route 18, and crews worked across the fire-affected area to clear roads so that residents could return home. Rain and snow fell overnight, stifling the fires’ efforts to grow (Associated Press 2003d). The drawdown of firefighters continued, with 5400 left, down from 15,631 at the peak of the blazes (Squatriglia, Kim, and Nolte 2003). More snow and rain fell on
November 2 (McMahon, Kenworthy, and Kasindorf 2003), and officials declared the fires tamed the following day. Davis and Schwarzenegger announced the formation of a panel that would study the state’s response to the fires and investigate “tearing down jurisdictional barriers that slowed the initial response, strengthening building and planning codes in fire zones and making military firefighting personnel and equipment available more quickly.” (Broder 2003b). As an emergency response center for victims of the Simi and Piru fires opened, FEMA spokesman John Treanor cautioned that “Unfortunately, we can't make people whole again – the government can't afford to do that” (Alvarez, Perry, and Leonard 2003). The Senate approved the $87.5 billion Iraq-Afghanistan bill, which included half a million dollars for combating fire (Hook 2003).

On November 4, Bush toured the area hit by the Cedar fire. He announced no new federal aid, but instead assured listeners that he had found existing aid being used efficiently (Allen 2003). Nearly two weeks later, on November 16, Davis petitioned the federal government to cover all of the state’s cleanup costs from the fire (San Diego Union-Tribune 2003).

Schwarzenegger took office on November 17 (Nicholas and Matthews 2003a).

On November 19, Congress worked out the final HFRA (Epstein 2003). The text, which largely resembled the version passed by the Senate, was put together by an informal committee of representatives from both houses after Democrats, angry at Republican attempts to lock their input out of conference committee deliberations over other bills, refused to nominate members for the Healthy Forests conference committee. The bill passed both houses on November 21 (Simon 2003). Bush signed it into law on December 3 (Bush 2003b).

**Bush and Healthy Forests**

The Healthy Forests Initiative (Bush 2002a) is one of Bush’s signature environmental policies. He unveiled it in August 2002, following catastrophic fires across the west. These fires generated the national attention that made it both necessary and advantageous for Bush to advance a new plan for dealing with wildfire. The HFI is an implementation of core components of the National Fire Plan’s 10-year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan, adopted by the federal Departments of Agriculture and the Interior and western governors, county
officials, state foresters, and tribal officials in May 2002. While the Bush administration pursued some of the goals of the HFI in 2002 and 2003, an act of Congress – the Healthy Forests Restoration Act – was necessary to reshape the regulatory landscape so that Bush’s HFI goals could be met. The HFI claims to “fulfill the promise” of the Northwest Forest Plan developed in 1994 by the Clinton administration. Bush blames the Northwest Forest Plan for creating procedural tangles that have led to a reduction in the amount of wood produced from the nation’s forests.

The HFI is rooted in what has become the conventional wisdom about wildfires. In recent years Smokey the Bear, and the fire suppression he stood for, has fallen out of favor. The 1988 fires in Yellowstone National Park alerted the nation that something was wrong with the fire suppression policy that had prevailed. Since then, fire ecologists and sympathetic journalists have pushed the diagnosis that fuel buildup is responsible for fires (e.g. Minnich 2003). By stopping the fires that would consume fallen wood and flammable understories, fire suppression allows biomass to build up to levels that fuel uncontrollable infernos when a spark finally sets them off.

Most proponents of the fuel buildup theory advocate more small fires – “prescribed burns,” done in ways that enable firefighters to keep the blaze under control – to keep fuel loads low. The HFI, on the other hand, emphasizes mechanical fuel removal – that is, cutting stuff down and taking it away.

There are two key components of the HFI: reduction of red tape and privatization of fuel reduction. The HFI alleges that red tape, especially judicial review of forest management policies and legal challenges to fuel reduction projects, has hindered the government’s ability to reduce fuel loads. According to the administration, bureaucratic procedures can delay fuel reduction for years and consume needless dollars. The HFI proposal estimates that $100 million a year could be saved by streamlining regulatory requirements. In his speech announcing the HFI, Bush said:

“I mean, there’s so many regulations, and so much red tape, that it takes a little bit of effort to ball up the efforts to make the forests healthy. And plus, there’s just too many lawsuits, just endless litigation. We want to make sure our citizens have the right to the courthouse. People ought to have a right to express themselves, no question about it. But there’s a fine balance between people expressing their
selves and their opinions and using litigation to keep the United States of America from enacting common sense forest policy” (Bush 2002b).

The HFI provides for limits on judges’ ability to halt fuel reduction projects while legal challenges are settled, and reduces the number of alternative projects that must be considered. It anticipates that these changes will have the additional effect of reducing the amount of additional preparatory research and documentation that the Forest Service carries out just in case its plans are challenged.

The anti-red tape discourse surrounding the HFI serves a dual function. On the one hand, it supports a reduction of government regulation by making government the problem. Government oversight interferes with the ability of capital and local governments to act as they please.

On the other hand, the criticism of red tape in the case of wildfires places the blame on the shoulders of environmentalists. The fault lies not simply with the blind cogs of bureaucracy but with the individuals who use that system to advance their partisan agenda. Environmental regulations are framed as not simply a stumbling block, but a tool. Further, the effects of this tool are obvious and devastating: acres burned, homes destroyed, lives lost. Implicitly, the blood of wildfire victims is on the hands of environmentalists reputed to care more about an endangered bird or an ancient tree than about people. Targetting environmentalists is significant both in the case of wildfire policy and in the broader arena, because they are an interest that has successfully challenged some elements of capital-friendly regulatory policy.

The Bush administration is intent on keeping the environmentalists-and-red tape discourse alive. Opponents of the HFI pointed to a 2001 study done by the General Accounting Office (GAO 2001) which showed that, contrary to Bush’s argument, environmental challenges hardly ever impacted hazard reduction projects. Of the 1671 fuel reduction projects done in fiscal 2001, only 20 had been appealed and none litigated. The appeals came from a variety of groups, including environmentalists, recreation groups, and private industry.

Bush ordered a new study done by the Forest Service (USDA Forest Service 2002), which reported in July 2002 that 48 percent of projects had been appealed and 20 percent litigated. This difference was achieved by examining a data set that included many forestry projects that were not fuel reduction projects. It was these other projects that bureaucratic and legal challenges held up (EMS 2003). The GAO issued a new analysis of more recent data in
2003 (GAO 2003), which corroborated its earlier finding and cast doubt on Bush’s claims: only five percent of fuel reduction projects in 2001 and 2002 were delayed by appeals.

Environmentalists are being targeted where they can be made to appear weak, and their loss may carry over into other regulatory arenas. As the Forest Service study found, environmentalists have been successful at blocking non-fuel-reduction forestry. Thus the HFI serves as a lever that can translate structural resources available in the wildfire arena into structural resources usable in the larger logging arena. That is, Bush was able to mobilize the pressure of public opinion and the evidence provided by the California fires in order to alter the regulation of forest management, and those new regulations can then be mobilized to support the activities of logging companies against environmentalists and others who find their major structural resource (the courts) curtailed in its power in that arena.

The second major theme of the HFI is the privatization of fuel reduction. Bush proposed the idea of Stewardship Contracts, under which a logging company would be permitted to cut the large timber in an area in exchange for agreeing to remove the understory, which is the most significant source of wildfire fuel. Under this system, contractors are granted access to a desirable resource in exchange for performing the service of fuel reduction.

The Healthy Forests Initiative does not employ a great deal of direct subsidy to capital – that is, payouts of government money. Bush has emphasized that, while he wants to continue funding firefighting, his priorities lie with structural changes. These structural changes amount to a different type of subsidy, paying logging companies with the state’s natural resources. The President told an Oregon audience just months before the California fires,

“It seems like the taxpayers come out okay. After all, if you’re able to keep some of the thinning, which protects our forests, as part of the payment, it’s a – takes a little load off the taxpayer. The local community’s tax base will get better when somebody spends the money they make from thinning the projects, and the forests are more healthy” (Bush 2003a).

While the Stewardship Contract system is designed based on an assumption that only large wood is profitable to cut, the HFI aims to encourage the growth of a small-diameter wood industry. The long-term contracts – a sort of quasi-privatization – are intended to give logging companies security that will encourage them to invest in the capital necessary for producing this line of products (Bush 2002a).
The House version of the HFRA, H.R. 1904, closely paralleled Bush’s wishes for the HFI. The Senate retained the overall structure of the measure as outlined, drawing no public protest from the White House, but did make several significant changes. The House version cut the number of alternatives to the proposed thinning that the Forest Service must consider down to one. The Senate required three – less than was generally the case before but more than the House wanted. It also doubled the spending on forest thinning to $760 a year, whereas the House made no such increase (Coile 2003a). The Senate version mandated that half of the money be spent near homes, and – according to supporters – more effectively protected old-growth forests from logging than would the House version. It also increased the number of days that a court injunction halting a thinning project would last, to 60 from the House’s 45 (Simon and Boxall 2003).

The final version of the HFRA maintained some of the Senate amendments, notably the limit on injunctions on challenges to thinning projects to 60 days, the authorization of $760 million a year for thinning projects, and the mandate that half of the money be spent in the urban-wildland interface (though local communities would be given the authority to define what areas qualify as interface). The houses compromised in requiring the consideration of two alternatives to proposed projects, except for projects within 1.5 miles of communities, where only one alternative would be necessary (Epstein 2003).

The idea that the California fires pressured lawmakers into passing the HFRA was widely recognized in the press. Senators explicitly pointed to California as a justification for the bill. This was not a case of a disaster event providing the entire impetus for a law, in the way that the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 motivated the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act. Nevertheless, the fires provided critical leverage and justification for a “yes” vote.

The principal discourse on the Senate floor was of the “we have to do something” variety. Democratic politics requires that legislators, through their actions and justifications, convince their constituents that they are addressing the pressing problems of the nation. Such explanations can make the actors out to be conniving opportunists, so it’s important to recognize that many Senators may be genuinely motivated to do the right thing. Thus, the structure of policymaking gains purchase on both an external (you’ll lose your job) and internal (you’ll have personally failed the nation) basis. For many issues, particularly those of a chronic nature, officials have a great deal of power to set the agenda and define what the problems facing the country are. The
fires were significant in that they were amplified (to borrow terminology from Kasperon 1992) outside of the direct action of politicians. As an acute catastrophic event, they had a great deal of power to get themselves noticed. They were also appealing to the media, as they lent themselves to the kinds of narratives that the media is disposed to seize upon and propagate. Thus, the main task for pro-HFI legislators was to make the connection between the fires and the HFRA. Senators felt that they had to do something, and that the something that must be done is the HFRA.

This connection was made through a combination of a sense of urgency and the prior limitation of options. It is crucial to the passage of the HFRA that it was the only option on the table. Proponents of the HFRA cultivated a discourse of urgency, which limited the ability to create new options. There appeared to be no time to write a new wildfire bill, or even to continue arguing over amendments to the HFRA. Prior politics determined that the HFRA was the only option on the table when it suddenly became too late to look for new alternatives. The Republicans’ position as majority party in both houses of Congress gives them substantial power to define the agenda. Republican leaders and committee chairs are both participants and enforcers of rules (such as scheduling of votes). Additionally, the presence of so many Republicans would have a chilling effect on alternative legislation that was unlikely to pass if it ever came to a vote. This is especially true in the House of Representatives, with its larger Republican majority and its lack of a filibuster rule that can give a large minority leverage. The Congressional Republican leadership is aligned with Bush’s view of regulation and his strategy of pursuing regulatory change through wildfire policy, due to a combination of party solidarity and philosophical agreement. This means that Bush and his collaborators had significant structural resources to use to make sure the HFRA was the wildfire policy that Congress considered, and that move paid off when the California fires hit.

A final factor that may have acted to amplify the effects of the California fires in securing the passage of the HFRA is the discursive parallel in the accusations of obstructionism leveled against Democratic Senators who would block the HFRA and against the environmentalists and regulation that would block fuel reduction projects. In both cases there’s an implication that those who do not share or acquiesce to Bush’s regulatory project do not want to address the problem of wildfire.
Nevertheless, the fires enabled a small victory by opponents of the HFI. It’s quite possible that the bill would have passed eventually even without the catastrophic blazes in southern California. The final bill is a net loss for the health and fire safety of the nation’s forests in the eyes of environmentalists, including myself. Yet by giving up on a vision of the environment that would be unattainable in today’s Republican-dominated federal government, and mobilizing the resources provided by the California fires, Democrats were able to dull some of the sharpest edges of the HFI.

Feinstein seized the opportunity provided by the “we must act now” discourse surrounding the wildfire plan to get the more moderate Senate version of the bill passed and to retain many Senate provisions in the compromise version that both houses approved. She declared that the moderate version was the only version that the Senate would accept. This move shifted the onus of action onto the Republicans. If they blocked the moderate version, insisting on amending it to accord more with Bush’s original vision, they would be the ones fiddling while California burned.

House Republicans were not happy with the Senate’s changes. Brian Kennedy, a spokesman for House Resources panel chairman Richard W. Pombo, quipped “Somebody should remind some of those senators that we don't have a unicameral Congress” (Simon and Boxall 2003).

The sense of urgency paid off for the pragmatic middle again in the conference committee. Republicans had locked out Democratic input from previous conference committees on the energy and Medicare bills. Democrats responded by refusing to nominate members for the conference committee on the Healthy Forests bill, a move that threatened to sink it because a conference committee must reconcile the differing House and Senate versions so that each house can take a yes-or-no vote and, if successful, send a single bill to the President’s desk. Instead, informal negotiations between Senators and Representatives hammered out the final bill. Both sides were propelled toward a compromise – toward a Senate version that was already a compromise of Democratic and Republican views, in preference to a House version that was largely Republican – by the fear of being labeled obstructionist. Feinstein declared that “We kept all the essential provisions of the Senate bill, and the changes we made were largely clarifications of the Senate's intent rather than substantive changes” (Epstein 2003). The official
conference committee – assembled once Democrats had been able to have their say through the informal negotiations – ok’d the bill and both houses of Congress swiftly passed it.

Bush expressed no reservations as he signed the HFRA into law. The cooperation of Democrats in putting the bill together allowed him to frame it as a bipartisan effort, rising above the political fray. He said that “This bill was passed because members of Congress looked at sound science, did the best they could to get all the politics out of the way for good legislation” (Bush 2003b). This disguises the fact that the HFRA was very much a political act – good politics from some people’s perspective, but politics nonetheless.

While California’s members of Congress were instrumental in getting the HFRA passed, Schwarzenegger was more reserved. He stated his support for the bill, but echoed criticisms that it would do little to help the situation in southern California (Campbell 2003). The HFRA is primarily aimed at forests, whereas southern California’s fires are fueled by chaparral. Schwarzenegger thus backed Bush’s initiative – either out of agreement on the merits, a desire to show solidarity with the President, or a combination thereof – while making the bill out to be an incomplete solution. If this framing were accepted, it could give him room to use the fires as justification for additional projects.

Arnold Schwarzenegger is: “The Collectinator”

During his first visit to Washington, Schwarzenegger joked that he was playing “the Collectinator,” coming to collect money from the federal government for California (Rosin 2003). Federal funds are one of the three prongs of his strategy for keeping the state solvent without increasing the burden on California’s private sector, the other two being borrowing and cutting wasteful spending. He has emphasized that Californians receive $.75 in federal spending for every dollar they send to Washington, and said “I’m looking forward to working with [Bush] and asking him for a lot, a lot of favors” (Murphy 2003, Parkes 2003). He was thus able to frame his plan as a matter of fairness, rather than purely asking for charity. However, the discourse shifted in the case of the fires. Disaster relief is one policy realm in which asking for charity is widely seen as acceptable, though there remain critics who complain that other parts of the country are asked to pay to bail out a place struck by disaster.
Schwarzenegger’s resources are somewhat precarious. The very structural conditions that allowed him to gain the governorship made it difficult for him to effect a re-regulation of California’s political economy. The state’s budget crisis was a major factor in sealing Davis’s fate, and Schwarzenegger’s promise of a minimal-pain solution helped to win him votes. These two requirements restrict his freedom of action, and failure would prove a powerful resource for his critics. The fires made the task even more difficult, as they drained additional funds from state coffers and forced him to use up some of his influence in Washington to secure fire aid.

Federal disaster aid law makes certain additional resources available to governors when a disaster strikes. One of the most significant is the funding that comes with a federal declaration of a state of emergency. Davis was unsuccessful at mobilizing those resources preemptively in his request to Bush to have the beetle-infested forests declared a state of emergency. The problem was a fine point of the policy, which stated that those funds could not be used to prevent a disaster from striking, only to battle and clean up from a disaster that had struck. Perhaps with additional resources – such as personal or political influence at FEMA, more time, or mobilizing public sentiment – he could have gotten the rules changed or bent in order to make the state of emergency resources available. Unfortunately, he lacked such additional resources. Once the fires began, however, the door opened and Davis was able to, through an appeal to Bush, use the structure of disaster aid to leverage the movement of financial resources to California.

With the state’s budget in bad shape, both Davis and Schwarzenegger saw that the resources available to them through standard use of the state of emergency provision were not adequate to meet California’s needs. Thus, they attempted to use their political clout and the discourse of disaster to persuade the federal government to up its contribution from 75% of the costs of the fires to 100%. Schwarzenegger hoped that he could do better (with regard to fire and to California’s other financial needs), because of his party affiliation with the leaders in Washington. Part of this is simple party loyalty. But Schwarzenegger also held out the prize of California’s electoral votes. California has more electoral votes than any other state, and has been reliably Democratic in recent presidential elections. Nevertheless, Bush campaigned there in the days just before the 2000 election, projecting an image that he would not write off any state as un-winnable. Schwarzenegger’s victory was hailed by many as a sign that the state could be brought into the Republican fold. It’s unlikely that he could simply hand the electoral votes over to his party, but an effective administration could help to foster pro-Republican sentiment
among Californians. It also fed a narrative of Republican triumphalism, along with Republican victories later in the year in the governor’s races in Mississippi and Kentucky. The big question was how well Schwarzenegger could turn the electoral prospects he represents into increased federal help for the state.

The Bush administration showed little interest in boosting federal aid to California beyond what has been customary. The rejection was phrased in two ways. First, Schwarzenegger was told that there simply wasn’t more money to be had. FEMA officials invoked a conception of a more rigid institutional structure that limited the relief options, as opposed to the more open system in which Schwarzenegger’s personal skills and charisma could be used to secure additional funding. Second, Bush himself portrayed funding levels as adequate. In his visit to southern California, the President asserted that the federal government was doing all it could, and said that he had verified that the money being sent to California was being used efficiently. This approach made the White House appear to be concerned for southern California, reaping some of the political benefits of disaster aid generosity (e.g. Davis 1998: 47-48) and avoiding the image of being uncharitable. Taking a non-combative approach made it more difficult to launch criticism (“politicizing” the disaster aid). In this case, the White House had the ultimate say, leaving Schwarzenegger with no way to compel him into cooperating with the governor’s disaster relief and regulatory plan.

Mike Davis (1998) argues for a nearly opposite strategy to Schwarzenegger’s. His criticisms highlight some of the effects of the disaster aid model on the continued freedom of capital. He criticizes disaster relief programs for allowing homes and businesses to be rebuilt bigger than ever, rather than being chastised into adopting a more ecologically rational development pattern by the threat of fire. After the 1993 Malibu fires, he says, “politicians and the media have allowed the essential landuse issue – the rampant, uncontrolled proliferation of firebelt suburbs – to be camouflaged in a neutral discourse about natural hazards and public safety” (p 146).

A viewpoint similar in some respects to Mike Davis’s was clearly visible in the aftermath of the 2003 California fires. There was little public support for the sort of Darwinian solution – cutting disaster relief – that Davis leans toward. However, there was some desire to discipline suburban development. These came in the form of calls for stricter building codes (e.g. USA
Today 2003) and social pressure through developing a discourse slamming irresponsible homeowners building in fire-prone environments (e.g. Ramirez 2003).

This sort of strategy is at odds with Schwarzenegger’s attempt to re-regulate the California political economy in a way that favors the interests of capital. He is opposed to laws limiting urban sprawl, preferring instead to give financial incentives for developers to use vacant urban areas (Schwarzenegger 2003b) – a quite business-friendly approach which hands some of the costs and risks of identifying and improving land to the government so that they do not negatively impact developers’ activity.

Some observers have drawn attention to his campaign’s war chest. While excoriating Gray Davis and Bustamante for taking funds from, and allegedly arranging quid-pro-quos for, “special interests” such as Indian tribes and unions, the Schwarzenegger campaign relied on donations from developers. For example, Capital Pacific Holdings, a development company working in the south coast area, donated $21,200 to Californians for Schwarzenegger and $78,800 to the Total Recall Committee, a group set up by Schwarzenegger to push for Gray Davis’s recall (Sams 2003). The new governor is himself a real estate investor (Wasserman 2003). While it’s too early to point to any wrongdoing or improper influence, the connection looks suspicious, and indicates that developers see their interests as being well served by Schwarzenegger.

In addition to the general difficulties Schwarzenegger encountered in adding the fires onto California’s already strapped budget, there were some more specific ways that the fire complicated his regulatory project. Lowering the vehicle license fee became especially problematic following the fires. Money from the car tax goes to local governments to pay for firefighting. When a fire or other disaster threatens, people tend to rally behind defenders of public order such as firefighters. Some observers were quick to point out that Schwarzenegger was following through on his promise to lower the car tax just as its direct beneficiaries were most in the limelight (Los Angeles Times 2003). Patrick McOsker, president of United Firefighters of Los Angeles, said of Schwarzenegger’s anti-car tax publicity stunt, “I remember thinking they might as well drop that wrecking ball on firetrucks, ambulances and police cars, because that’s the effect that the car tax repeal will have here in L.A.” (Nicholas and Halper 2003). Nevertheless, Schwarzenegger pushed ahead and repealed the tax increase on his first day in office. The new Governor retained the structural authority to cut the tax, but he lost some
social influence resources, particularly among the local officials who were most likely to see the connection between the tax and firefighting.

Schwarzenegger is forging ahead with his economic policies, but he is not being helped by having to deal with the wildfires.

Conclusion

It is too early to fully assess how politics, capital, and the environment will be affected by the strategies pursued by Bush and Schwarzenegger around the 2003 California wildfires. In the political sphere, the HFI may help Bush burnish his environmental credentials in the face of criticism that he is the worst environmental president in history, or it may become a tool for opponents to portray him as selling out the environment to his corporate cronies. Schwarzenegger’s performance may improve his image as “the people’s governor,” but his shortcomings on the financial end could be one of a series of failures that lead Californians to reject him next time around. Logging companies look set to benefit from the HFI, while suburban developers’ fate still hangs on Schwarzenegger’s success in balancing the state’s budget. The lack of change in the governmental regulatory sphere under Schwarzenegger may lead to changing self-regulation among developers, as the fires produce calls from customers for different sorts of housing while impressing upon capital the consequences of their current practices given the state’s lack of additional aid that would preserve the previous mode of accumulation. The environment is likely to suffer as the HFI allows logging to penetrate more easily. In California, much hinges on the nature of the changes in the spatial pattern of suburban development following the fires.

The discourse surrounding the HFI helped to cut away at the power of environmentalism, portraying environmentalists in a bad light and depriving them of legal resources. Yet at the same time, the HFI helped to improve Bush’s image as a real friend of the environment. Given the broad support for environmental protection in the American electorate, a politician can ill afford to be seen as overtly anti-environment. Instead, an official who wants to pursue policies that run against what has been defined as “good for the environment” has three options. One option is to emphasize the tradeoffs with other values (such as jobs) and portray opponents as
extremists single-mindedly fixated on the environment. Another option is to build up political
capital in other areas (either other environmental actions, or in areas like social policy that
environmentalist voters also care about) that can absorb the negative impact of an anti-
environmental policy. The third option, which Bush has favored, is to redefine what counts as
“good for the environment.” Rather than accept the dominant narrative of conflict between
capital and the environment, Bush has worked to bring them into accord by (supposedly)
pursuing environmental goals through capital-friendly mechanisms (Griscom 2003).

Schwarzenegger, meanwhile, largely wrote the environment out of his struggles for
disaster aid. Unlike Bush – who has been denounced as the worst environmental president ever
(Kennedy 2003) – Schwarzenegger took fairly liberal positions on the environment. He earned
kudos for appointing noted environmentalist Terry Tamminen to head the California
Environmental Protection Agency, though he favors business-friendly forms of environmental
protection (Wasserman 2003). Yet this element of the discourse did not enter his handling of the
wildfires. The fires, though rooted in “the environment” as it’s typically defined in contemporary
American politics, were treated in the same way that a “non-environmental” disaster like an
earthquake or a tornado would have been.

The struggles and successes of Arnold Schwarzenegger and George W. Bush illustrate
the contentiousness and contextuality of the regulation of capitalism. Regulation is not, as a
simplistic reading of the original regulation theory literature would have it, an all-pervading
logic. Rather, it is a constellation of conflicting and incompletely realized logics. Any vision of
regulation is compromised in its implementation by the resources available to an actor and the
conflicting visions being implemented by others. Further, its implementation is affected by
events like the 2003 wildfires that have a significant natural and unexpected component.
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