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ON POLITICS IN THE GOLDEN STATE

### Three former governors come together to support California Conservation Corps

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Democratic gubernatorial candidate Jerry Brown joined two fellow former governors Thursday night at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles for a reception honoring the work of the California Conservation Corps, a program they have all supported. In a rare joint appearance, Brown, former GOP Gov. George Deukmejian and former Democratic Gov. Gray Davis mingled with guests for nearly an hour in an ornate ballroom over cocktails, sometimes a few feet from one another.

The three men, along with former Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, joined forces more than a year ago, using their political clout to advocate for the Corps after Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed eliminating its funding in the 2009-10 budget. After receiving a letter from the four former governors strongly supporting the Corps, Schwarzenegger restored funding for the program, which is modeled after the Civilian Conservation Corps and employs 18- to 25-year-olds to do natural-resources work that includes emergency-response efforts to fires, floods and earthquakes.

In speeches Thursday night, the three former governors hailed the program as one both parties could get behind. "It's about service, it's about collaboration, it's about discipline, it's about acquiring skill in service to something bigger than yourself," said Brown, who signed the program into law when he was governor in 1976.

Deukmejian, who followed Brown in a speaking order that went in chronological order of governorship, said it was clear to him when he took office in 1983 "what a valuable operation this could be for the state and the people who are in it."

"Lots of times people think, one governor comes along after another and if one was a Democrat and one was a Republican -- well, the Republican is going to throw out everything the former Democratic governor did," Deukmejian said. "Well, let me tell you, we not only did not throw out the CCC, but we tried to strengthen it and actually ... I signed the legislation to make it a permanent state agency."

Davis noted that the "Corps only comes when you're in trouble -- that's why it's one of the most popular agencies in state government."

In his own nod to bipartisanship during the cocktail hour, Brown circled the room and buttonholed Deukmejian shortly after he arrived. Though much of their conversation was not audible, Brown greeted him by saying: "You're keeping in good shape, George."

At one point, he appeared to jokingly offer Deukmejian a chance to go back to Sacramento, asking whether he had any interest in taking over as the state's director of finance. With reporters hovering nearby, Brown also observed that his administration and Deukmejian's had "created the most jobs" and that after that time it started "going downhill." But their conversation was soon interrupted by other guests, elbowing their way in for a chat with the former governors and/or a picture with Brown.

Notably absent was Wilson, who is chairman of the campaign of Brown's rival, Meg Whitman.

In a letter that was read aloud at the event, Wilson commended his fellow governors for their work on behalf of the Corps: "When the time came for you to stand up for this important program, you answered the call," Wilson wrote. He said he was unable to attend Thursday night's event because he was out of the country on a long-planned trip. "In the Galapagos Islands to be exact," he wrote, "and I suspect some of you are thinking there is a good joke in here somewhere."

-- [Maeve Reston](#)