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## Steve Wiegand: Roll calls without the egos

**By Steve Wiegand - Bee Columnist**

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I have seen the future of California politics -- and it looks pretty much like the present.

Now, this is the kind of statement that might lead a reasonable person to stick his or her head in the microwave, blow the kids' college money on lottery tickets, or begin analyzing housing prices in Nova Scotia.

But try to push on. Maybe your fears will be assuaged.

The crystal ball for this glimpse into politics-yet-to-be was afforded by the 59th Annual California YMCA Model Legislature, going on at the Convention Center and Capitol.

It's a pretty cool program. Begun in New York in 1936 and debuting in California in 1949, it has about 2,000 teenagers from around the state assuming the roles of constitutional officers, legislators, key legislative staff, lobbyists and press types.

The program's structure and procedures are relatively lifelike. The kids draft legislation, hold committee hearings on it, lobby and get lobbied, and follow most of the procedures their real-life counterparts do, except the kids tend to dress better.

But there are some major deviations from the real world. The teenage legislators are devoid of the petty partisanship that dominates so much of their elders' efforts. The atmosphere is devoid of the rank stench of special-interest campaign contributions. And most of the kids lack the swollen egos of many real politicians.

"This is basically a good way to learn," said Rita Lugo, an 18-year-old from Culver City who is in her third year as a "model legislator" (an oxymoronic term if there ever was one). "Actually doing this is different than reading about it in government class. ... I don't necessarily want to be a politician, but it helps me understand the issues."

Like real-life legislation, the issues reflected by the YMCA group range from the thought-provoking to the nonsensical:

- A bill to forbid housing discrimination on the basis of immigration status.
- A measure to repeal the statute of limitations on rape.
- A proposal to make the day after Halloween a holiday.

- A bill to require obese people to park in the back of the parking lot.

And like the legislation, the model legislators are an eclectic bunch, ranging from the wallflower to the, well, governor.

As in Gov. Ian David Bruce, a 17-year-old from Santa Clara High School, with a voice reminiscent of Barry White's and a personality reminiscent of the other governor's.

Bruce, the son of a San Francisco police sergeant and a computer software worker, says his favorite class is drama. He demonstrated his grasp of the subject Thursday when it became necessary to stall for time while waiting to introduce Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Rather than let the natives get too restless, Bruce smoothly fielded personal questions from the audience, and just as smoothly avoided answering the too-personal ones.

It was an entertaining glimpse at where politicians come from, and one of the more heartening elements of the afternoon.

There are two more such elements worth mentioning. One was the kids' impressive level of sophistication. With all of Schwarzenegger's star power, for instance, several of them told me they were more interested in what was said by state Treasurer Bill Lockyer than by the gov.

"Lockyer seemed to be more specific on things," said Goldie Dacnay, another Culver City 18-year-old.

The other was the group's acceptance of its diverse ethnic, racial and cultural makeup, and its willingness to confront divergent views without acrimony.

Carry those attitudes over to when you're of voting age, guys, and we old folks can stop perusing the Nova Scotia real estate ads.

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