

Synopsis: Wherein the author discusses the flap over Schwarzenegger's "girlie men" comment and what it says about the left's disdain for masculinity.

TERMINATE THE GIRLIE MEN

By Don Feder

California's political sideshow is often entertaining and occasionally enlightening. A case in point is the flap over Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's "girlie men" remark.

At a July 18th rally at a shopping mall in Ontario, Calif., the Governor suggested that Democratic legislators -- who are blocking his \$103-billion budget proposal -- are a bunch of interest-whipped wimps.

"I call them *girlie men*," Schwarzenegger told a cheering crowd at a mega-mall 40 miles east of Los Angeles. "If they don't have the guts to come up here in front of you and say, 'I don't want to represent you, I want to represent those special interests, the unions, the trial lawyers...' If they don't have the guts, I call them *girlie men*."

What's instructive here isn't the governor's throwaway line --with which he also poked fun at himself, by alluding to a Saturday Night Live skit of bodybuilders trying to imitate the Austrian-born actor -- but the outrage it provoked.

Columnist Arianna Huffington, who briefly ran against Schwarzenegger in last year's recall election (and has an accent reminiscent of the Hungarian countess in '30s vampire movies), delivered her usual screeching performance.

The governor is "a bully," Huffington huffed. "When seduction doesn't work anymore, the bully comes out. The expression 'girlie man' is the bully speaking. It's not something you can imagine 99 percent of politicians saying." She's right, of course. That's why they're so boring and Schwarzenegger is such fun -- even if you disagree with him, as I frequently do.

But the lady with a tax loophole Arnold could drive his Hummer through was restrained, compared to the governor's Democratic adversaries, who acted like the sensitivity Gestapo.

- Assemblyman Mark Leno (Democrat, San Francisco), chairman of the 5-member Legislative Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Caucus (what about the transvestites and Transylvanians?), whined: "By playing to certain voters' discomfort with gender and sexuality, the governor has exposed himself as a divider, not a uniter." Shocking!
- State Sen. Sheila Kuehl, a member of said caucus, lamented: "It uses an image that is associated with gay men in an insulting way, and it was supposed to be an insult. That's very troubling that he would use such a homophobic way of trying to put down the legislative leadership." Arnold you've been found guilty of using "an image that is associated with gay men (*by whom?*) in an insulting way," and are hereby sentenced to a complete fashion makeover by "Queer Eye for the Gov. Guy."
- Fabian Nunez, the Democratic speaker of the Assembly, said that while he didn't personally "feel bullied by this guy," his daughter, age-13, is very upset. And the emotional state of an adolescent is supposed to prove what, exactly? This is almost as hilarious as Jimmy Carter citing his daughter's fears of nuclear war in a presidential debate.

Of course, it's always easier to claim an opponent is insensitive to this or that sacred minority, than it is to answer his arguments.

The left has developed the knack of being mortally offended at the drop of an off-hand comment. After each PC tantrum, the media focus not on the issue at hand, but the *appropriateness* of the remark, whether it a sign of latent or blatant hostility toward the group in question.

But there's a more fundamental reason for the establishment's ire. The expression *girlie men* implies that there are manly men, which in turn suggests that there are masculine traits. This, feminists, and their cultural auxiliary, cannot abide.

Since the '70s, no concept has lost more ground than masculinity. Against all observable evidence, we are instructed by media and academic experts alike that gender traits are socially determined. Men can be nurturing; women can be aggressive, they inform us, with desperation in their voices.

When reality doesn't reflect advocacy – when the overwhelming majority of CEOs remain men, when sports continue to have men's and women's divisions, when mothers remain far more likely to stay home with newborns than fathers, when little girls still gravitate to dolls and boys to toy trucks – it's all attributed to societal indoctrination, entrenched misogyny, education that stunts the development of girls and those ubiquitous glass ceilings.

Feminist mythology even shapes military policy – thus the drive to put women closer and closer to the front lines, in the hope that we will someday arrive at the nirvana of women in combat. When a female POW was repeatedly sodomized by her Iraqi captors last year, the horror was largely ignored by an establishment anxious to advance the fantasy of the warrior woman.

In 1997, Sara Lister resigned as the Army's assistant secretary for manpower and reserve affairs after telling an audience that Marines are "extremists." Since the Corps is that branch of the service most identified with masculine ideals (courage, commitment and endurance), it became a special target of the Clintonistas.

But nowhere is masculinity more out of fashion than in the industry where Schwarzenegger made his mark.

Aside from the action hero (more caricature than role model), it's hard to find an appealing portrayal of masculinity in the movies unless the film is set at least 50 years in the past.

There are no shortage of muscular women—chicks with karate kicks -- (“Charlie’s Angels,” The Bride in “Kill Bill,” “Laura Croft,” and “Catwoman”) in the movies. Thanks to the wizardry of special effects, they always stomp their man.

Macho posturing is still the leitmotif of action films. But real men in the movies (who are protective, heroic and stalwart – men who don’t whine, whimper and carry on like Victorian ladies with a case of the vapors) are as scarce as NRA members at a Democratic nominating convention.

Aversion to masculinity is one reason the Western fell out of favor during the Vietnam era (a conflict presumably precipitated by John Wayne).

The Western hero was everything the culture now disdains – the strong, silent type who put loyalty above self-interest, who felt obligated to protect the weak and who had a code of honor.

Today, Hollywood is in the grip of an androgynous chic. Actors like Johnny Depp and Hugh Grant seem to merge masculine and feminine. Hollywood is fascinated by men who are weak and confused, who can’t quite decide if they’re groom or bride. (I agonize, therefore I am.)

Even Mel Gibson shaved his legs and tried on pantyhose in “What Women Want,” a classic put-down of masculinity.

This penchant for guys in touch with their feminine side has invaded politics.

While tall-in-the-saddle Dutch Reagan was an ‘80s political icon, in the ‘90s, Blubbering Bill (who could feel your pain and saturate your shoulder on cue) made us proud to be whatever we were.

Republicans were warned that in the gender gap lay their doom. They were told that by being insufficiently sensitive (opposing gun control and supporting welfare reform), they were in danger of losing the soccer moms, the swing voters du jour. No one in the media considered the flip side of the cliché – that Democrats had lost the Super Bowl dads on the other side of gender gap.

Hoping to reprise the era of soft feelings, the two Johns on the Democratic ticket can't stop petting each other – acting like a couple of excited, adolescent boys on their first date. This contrasts with the media image of Bush as the tough-talking Texan.

European criticism of U.S. foreign policy is usually couched in testosterone terms – adventurers, cowboys, tough-guy/ go-it-alone interventionists.

Mostly, catcalls from the continent sound like the envy of the self-castrated for gentlemen with their equipment intact. (Is not Jacques Chirac the ultimate *girlie man*?)

The culture may not like masculinity, but 9/11 showed us the value of having men around when savages are on the prowl. The cops and firefighters who lost their lives saving others at the World Trade Center weren't in touch with their feminine side. (Peggy Noonan discussed this with her typical lyricism in "Welcome Back, Duke," shortly after 9/11.)

The U.S. soldiers fighting and dying in Iraq are classic examples of American manhood -- not a *girlie man* among them.

Conan the Politician isn't apologizing for his act of political incorrectness. If he uses the line during his speech at the Republican National Convention ("And I've got a message for those *girlie men* in the other party..."), it could become his new slogan, replacing, "I'll be back."

The frenzy thus precipitated would add a bit of color to what threatens to be another deadly dull presidential campaign.