

"We hit it off immediately," Vasconcellos says of his "partnership" with Bill Clinton. When Clinton announced his candidacy, Vasconcellos became the first elected official in California to formally endorse him, his long relationship with the Brown family and Jerry Brown's candidacy notwithstanding.

In July, when Clinton made his first major post-convention visit to San Jose, Vasconcellos introduced the candidate. Months earlier, he had made another key private introduction as well, linking Clinton up his longtime fundraiser, businesswoman Gloria Rose Ott, who quickly and successfully went to work wooing Silicon Valley heavyweights. After decades of supporting Republicans, dozens of local high-tech CEOs, including HP's John Young and Apple's John Sculley, endorsed Clinton, handing the Democratic nominee a major coup.

**L**AST YEAR, as it became clear California was heading for economic collapse, Vasconcellos initiated a business outreach program called ADEPT, the Assembly Democratic Economic Prosperity Task Force. After recruiting leaders from all of the Assembly's key committees, Vasconcellos went about the task of introducing the Democratic-controlled Legislature to his mostly GOP CEO friends around the state. His pitch was straightforward. The Democratic Legislature, Vasconcellos admitted, had not spent too much time worrying about business conditions in California because the evidence indicated conditions were generally acceptable and the economy was thriving. Steady growth in jobs, year after year, had led legislators to focus on more pressing social concerns, such as protecting the environment, providing worker-safety laws and increasing support for public education. With the end of the Cold War, however, Vasconcellos sensed a change in direction was necessary.

More than 60 private "learning sessions" were conducted with leaders in California's aerospace, electronics, defense, biotechnology, semiconductor, fishing and other industries. The result, a package of new legislation, including proposals to reform the state's fraud-plagued worker's compensation system and to provide job-creating economic incentives to local businesses, is finding support on both sides of the political aisle.

The effort has won Vasconcellos accolades in the business community and challenged the conventional myth that Republicans are better for business than their counterparts. Among Vasco's fans are Steve Panzer, founder of the Southern California-based Technology Leadership Council, whose membership includes CEOs from such firms as Intel and AST Research, many of whom played major roles in supporting the Senate candidacies of Ed Zschau and Tom Campbell.

leaders, we now ask them, 'Why aren't you working more closely with John Vasconcellos?' " Panzer says, adding that many of TLC's members "don't buy" the argument made by Republican leaders that the state's business problems are most properly laid at the feet of Vasconcellos and his longtime ally, Speaker Willie Brown. "The problem in Sacramento is all this partisanship and bickering," Panzer concludes.

It is his ability to win support from many quarters that so impresses Vasconcellos' colleagues. "Year after year," Speaker Brown says, "John has built a wider range of people who respect his skills and follow his leadership on the basis of merit.

"Every year, John grows," Brown adds, "more so than anyone else up here [Sacramento]. I don't know how you keep doing that." Brown credits Vasconcellos with having provided "the heart and soul" of the state Legislature, noting that Vasconcellos chaired the legislative conference committee for ten weeks during the budget impasse.

Vasconcellos has indeed constructed an enormous political foundation. A cosponsor of the law that decriminalized the possession of small quantities of marijuana for personal use and a tireless advocate of making the medicinal use of marijuana fully legal, Vasconcellos is also admired by anti-abortion activists for his attempts to discourage abortion, which he personally opposes, by increasing state support for pregnant women, prenatal care, child care and adoption programs. Although troubled by a state that can find the resources to abort children but won't come up with the money to care for them, Vasconcellos wrote the compromise language that allows Medi-Cal funding of abortions. "It's the most difficult issue I've ever had to face," Vasconcellos says glumly, still noticeably uncomfortable with the dilemma.

Recently, when feminist author Gloria Steinem visited Kepler's bookstore in Palo Alto to read from her new book, *Revolution From Within*, which contains an entire section devoted to Vasconcellos' self-esteem crusade, Steinem was asked how she could write so warmly about Vasconcellos considering his personal opposition to abortion. Steinem corrected the questioner on the details and added more praise. "He's a very admirable man," she countered, allowing that he could become "even more admirable in the future."

One criticism of Vasconcellos that does make the rounds, particularly among local Democrats, is that, despite several decades of winning elections, Vasconcellos has not put together anything resembling a political machine. In other areas, a winning streak like that enjoyed by Vasconcellos has resulted in the creation of a power nexus, like the Brown-Burton gang in San Francisco or the Berman-Waxman team in Los Angeles,

which dominates local politics, selecting candidates, bankrolling elections and keeping outsiders at bay. While Vasconcellos does help selected individual local candidates, he says he does so based on his personal knowledge of their integrity and philosophy, not based on their political or party identification.

His friendship with Republican state Sen. Becky Morgan is an example. Morgan, a former Bank of America vice president, is widely considered to be a top potential GOP contender for statewide office, perhaps even the governorship, in a future election. A likely Democratic opponent for Morgan may even be one of his longtime friends, state Treasurer Kathleen Brown. Yet Vasconcellos has become a friend and ally of Morgan's, even inviting her to join him on the board of a nonprofit organization, California Leadership, which Vasconcellos designed to get underrepresented populations, such as women and members of ethnic minority groups, working together with top government leaders to create what Vasconcellos calls "a new leadership ethic based on inclusion and cooperation."

"We really do need to develop a new style of leadership," Morgan agrees. Despite repeated pleas, Morgan broke with the state Republican party and declined to endorse Vasconcellos' GOP opponent in the November election.

Vasconcellos rebuffs the charge that he is too close to one of the GOP's fastest-rising stars. "It's good for California," he says, "that we can and do work together."

There are a few local races in which the assemblyman takes an interest, notably the attempt by San Jose City Council member Jim Beall to unseat incumbent Republican Assemblyman Chuck Quackenbush. For starters, Vasconcellos introduced Beall to the 150 people who attended the recent opening of his reelection campaign headquarters as "an absolutely essential" replacement for Quackenbush, one of the few people in Sacramento Vasconcellos does not get along with particularly well.

With another election approaching, Vasconcellos is running hard despite typically lightweight opposition. He's revved up his supporters and spent each weekend for months personally walking precincts and knocking on doors.

His opponent, 29-year-old Santa Clara Councilmember Tim Jeffries (see article on page 30) has drawn vendetta money from the Wilson camp, as well as from state prison guards who know that Vasco's attempts to control prison costs could hit them in the pocketbook.

In attempting to capitalize on the electorate's anger at politicians, Jeffries portrays his opponent as a dated anachronism, advertising, "After 26 years in office, it's time for a change."

Ironically, returning this powerful legislator to Sacramento could produce some of the biggest changes yet.