

Senate President Pro Tempore

# John Burton

THE PHOENIX IS A FRIEND

By Laura Grubb

*He's the second most powerful person in California's Legislature, ranking behind only Governor Gray Davis in influence. Thankfully he's also familiar with racing, and more importantly, friendly to it, having co-authored, along with former State Senator Ken Maddy, California's historic license fee relief bill- SB 27.*

*Who is he?*

*He's John Burton, one of the most effective, colorful individuals ever to walk the capitol's hallowed halls.*

John Burton can be likened to a phoenix, that legendary bird that burns itself on a pyre, only to rise out of its ashes renewed.

Thirty-five years ago the San Francisco liberal began his ascent into the political world, devotedly serving California's poor and underprivileged as a Democrat in the State Assembly. Always a friend of organized labor, his ability to command bipartisan respect, along with a gifted lawmaking ability, enabled him to reach the United States Congress, where he served from 1974 until 1982.

In the process, however, Burton ignited his pyre via drugs and alcohol, into which he plunged to escape his grief over the deaths of long time friends George Moscone, San Francisco's mayor who was assassinated in 1979, and Congressman Leo Ryan, who lost his life in Guyana while investigating Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones.

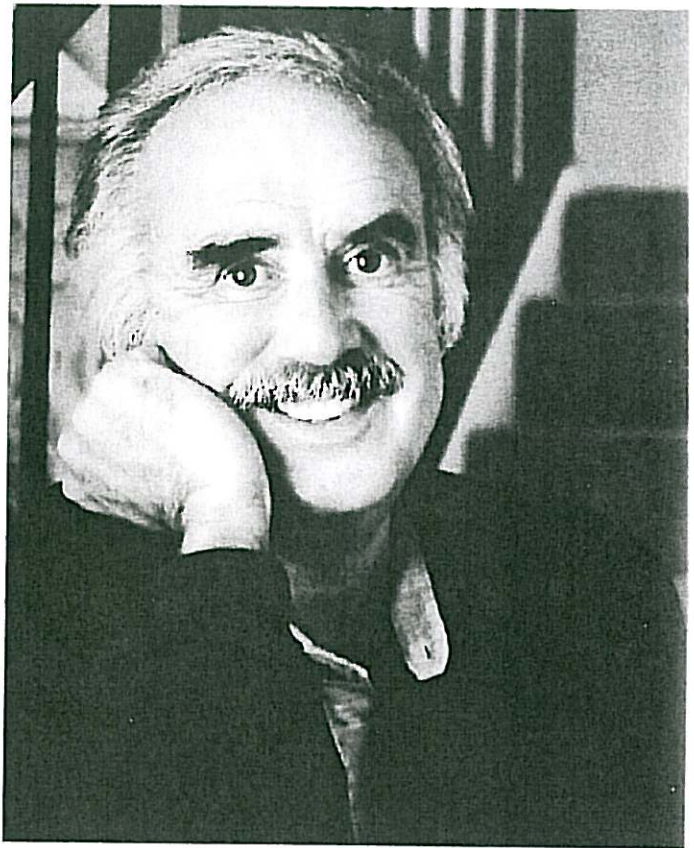
Politics lost Burton for six years, during which time he completed drug and alcohol rehabilitation and returned to practicing law in his beloved San

Francisco. However, his old friend and legendary California legislator Willie Brown encouraged him to come back to the political arena, which Burton did by running for California's State Assembly in 1988. Easily winning, Burton was sworn in on the Assembly floor by then Attorney General John Van de Kamp, and served in the Assembly until 1996, when he was elected to the State Senate. After a mere two years in the Senate, Burton was elected President Pro Tem in 1998. The phoenix had risen.

Burton's conduct and style is legendary - he's been known to rant directly in the face of opponents during legislative sessions, with a few expletives thrown in for good measure. Impassioned might be an understatement in describing Burton, but his spark shakes up what otherwise might be described as a stodgy Senate. Bottom line, Burton's wisdom and experience in politics, coupled with his unending energy, enable him to get things done. He's loyal to the core, and his word is as good as the proverbial gold.

While in Congress, Burton sponsored measures that established a wilderness area within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, restricted off-shore oil drilling, created a marine sanctuary off San Francisco, and prohibited the CIA from assassinating foreign leaders or secretly funding foreign elections.

As an Assemblyman, Burton pushed



laws that required schools to enroll autistic children, secured \$15 million for the University of California Medical Center to fund drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, reformed asset forfeiture laws by stopping the seizure of property from people not convicted of a crime, and developed a funding formula for the SSI program for the aged, blind, and disabled. During his first year as California's Senate leader, Burton engineered increased funding for public education, restored the renter's tax credit (which he initially developed), and helped provide for a cut in the state vehicle license fee and targeted tax cuts for business. A mover and shaker he is.

While not roaming the halls of the state capitol, Burton enjoys racquetball, abstract painting, and old jazz records. He has one child, his daughter Kimiko, who serves as the Director of the Mayor's Criminal Justice Council in San Francisco. Occasionally Burton can be seen at California's racetracks playing a pony or two. He fits in well. 🐾

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