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## Embracing A New California Vision That Isn't So New

BY KERRY JACKSON

Republican San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer recently gave a speech to the Commonwealth Club where he called for a “new vision” that will broaden his party’s appeal.

He has a point. There’s no arguing that the California GOP doesn’t need a makeover – it has achieved near permanent minority status. It will take the leadership of elected officials such as Faulconer and others to make Republicans competitive again in California.

Faulconer’s call for a new vision begs the bigger question – is now the time for a new vision for California government itself?

The answer is yes. However, a new vision for state government doesn’t have to be innovative. It should really be more like the old California vision of economic freedom and opportunity for all.

California was once the envy of the rest of the country, and the world. Magnificent weather. Striking physical beauty. Mountains. Beaches. Lush forests. Stunning rivers and lakes. Abundant natural resources. A fertile valley capable of feeding the world. First-rate schools that ably prepared students. Not-quite-golden but certainly top-notch streets. Cheap energy. California was known as a land of economic plenty, of endless opportunity, and of nearly unimaginable affluence. It was truly an economic force on a scale that had never been seen before.

Today, California’s better known for a long list of well-documented problems. It suffers from a crippling housing shortage

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that's pushed prices out of reach for many. The state's tax system is the most harmful in the country. Businesses are escaping the regulatory morass and a struggling middle-class just can't take it anymore. Legislated promises to public employees that should have never been made are going to end up robbing taxpayers. Energy prices are too steep for a state with California's mild climate. The poverty rate, at 20.6 percent, according to the Census Bureau, is the highest in the nation. A once-efficient, model-for-others infrastructure is in sharp decline.

Amid this spiral, Sacramento is fixated on the climate, which the state cannot possibly change; the Trump presidency, which it doesn't like; a high-speed rail, that is part of a larger political agenda to herd people rather than let them roam freely; intervening in commerce and manipulating markets; and always more spending.

"It's almost as if we can't handle pre-modern challenges so we look for post-modern, pie-in-the-sky solutions," Central Valley farmer and Hoover Institution scholar Victor Davis Hanson said in a July interview on KQED radio.

California needs a return to its 1950s and 1960s attitude, in which the state thought of itself in a far different way. Cyril Magnin, a lifelong Californian, Democratic party power-broker, and department store magnate known as "Mr. San Francisco," summed up the California attitude when he told Joel Kotkin in the late 1970s that post-war "California has recaptured what America once had — the spirit of pioneering. People in business out here are creative; they're willing to take risks."

Public policy has eliminated much of the reward that often flows from risk. We live in an over-regulated and over-taxed state. Economic growth has been managed and restrained by overactive lawmaking. The pioneer spirit is being replaced by a culture that is trading a civil society for a political society.

California still attracts hard workers and fortune seekers. But the magnet is located in Silicon Valley and ultra-wealthy pockets along the coast. This state is much bigger than that, and not only in a

physical way. If it is to return to its past glory and stop living off a rusting reputation, the California vision must center around:

- Allowing the private sector to do what it's supposed to: start businesses, create jobs, innovate, build homes, provide health care through market mechanisms, freely participate in voluntary exchanges, and educate children.
- Reeling in state and local governments so that they execute only the few functions they're intended to perform: building and maintaining infrastructure without political manipulation and at reasonable costs; protecting individuals' rights; and operating a fair judicial system.
- A renewed dedication to academics and rigor in California's institutes of higher learning and the abandonment of substance-free, politically correct curriculum.

It's past time for Sacramento, and counties and cities across the state, to restrain their almost uncontrollable urge to regulate. They must abandon their institutionalized efforts to please politically favored movements (the campaign against climate change), create legacies for elected officials (Gov. Jerry Brown's high-speed rail), build unbreakable voting blocs (public employee unions), and solve problems the private sector is well-equipped to handle.

If our state is to again become a destination rather than the place many want to escape, policymakers have to unleash California. They won't be turning back the clock, as some will complain. Instead, they'll be looking ahead as their lawmaking predecessors once did.

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