



OUR STATE, OUR SOLUTIONS

Statement of *California Forward's* Vision for California

We believe California is an inspirational place of freedom and opportunity, unparalleled imagination and innovation, natural beauty and quality of life. But this vision – the world famous California Dream – is imperiled by an outdated government. If we can improve government’s performance, the Golden State can prosper – and the dream will stay alive for our children and their children.

We face grave circumstances. State government is \$200 billion in debt, school and social service budgets have been deeply cut, our infrastructure crumbles around us, and billions more in red ink are expected over the next five years. While we all rely on government services, we have lost trust in public systems. Partisan gridlock and warring interest groups thwart statewide solutions to regional and community challenges – to educate children and grow jobs, restore the environment and revitalize neighborhoods. Without major improvements, there is serious doubt that California’s businesses – employers, big and small – will be globally competitive, further slowing economic recovery.

The time is now. The crisis is serious enough that Californians are ready to act. To make California work, we must govern ourselves in new ways that better serve the vast, diverse and complex nation-state that California has become. This restructuring – of authority and finances, expectations and accountability – must push decision-making closer to the people. We must bolster democracy in every elected position and improve the value of every public dollar. These changes should be guided by the following imperatives:

- 1. Improve Government Performance.** Government must be as innovative, productive and creative as California. Innovations must accelerate decisions, yield efficiencies and boost results in such vital services as schools, transportation and public safety.
 - Achieving these goals will require passionately committing to our vision, documenting progress, accelerating improvements, and clarifying roles and responsibilities to eliminate the excuses and ambiguities that lead to mediocrity.
 - California must be a high value state – by better using technologies, controlling costs, and making sure that programs improve lives. Californians must be confident tax dollars are well spent in pursuit of the public interest.
 - Government must be transparent and accountable so Californians know where progress is being made and what must change to make additional improvements.

2. **Move Government Closer to the People.** Californians live in communities and work in regional economies. Local governments must be empowered and expected to create strategies and design programs that nurture resilient communities and support vibrant regional economies.
 - Counties, cities, schools and special districts need the authority and the incentives to work together – and with private partners – to deliver community-level services. They also must cooperate regionally to efficiently meet transportation, environmental and other goals.
 - The tax system needs to reflect the modern marketplace, and give greater control over revenues to the level of government that is responsible for delivering services, along with incentives to cooperate, innovate and succeed.
 - In exchange for financial autonomy and program authority, community governments must accept rigorous scrutiny and public accountability – for the quality and cost of services, for strategies and programs that work, and for meeting minimum standards.
 - Government must engage the citizenry and harness the energy and innovation of the people.
3. **Invest in the Future.** To be globally competitive and grow middle class jobs, California will need to make disciplined, effective and productive investments in education, infrastructure and other programs.
 - California’s regional economies require investments in people – to give Californians the skills and education to continue global leadership in technology and innovation. Every neighborhood school and community college must be capable of helping young Californians develop the skills that lead to self-sufficiency and success in the workplace.
 - Investments also must be made in transportation, water, energy and communications to support efficient growth in all of California’s regions. These investments must be smartly selected, designed and executed to create a clean and sustainable urban footprint and to preserve the environment.
4. **Promote a Viable, Inclusive and Responsive Democracy.** The technologies and the demands of the Information Age increase the need and the capacity for government to be more responsive and accountable for results. Californians must be more involved in expressing preferences and satisfaction and through citizen engagement the opportunity of all Californians will increase.
 - Candidates need to be encouraged to appeal to all constituents, rather than polarizing extremes. The system needs to be retooled to attract the most capable leaders into public service, to encourage voter participation and to reduce special interest dominance.
 - The tools of direct democracy, such as initiatives, must be revised to reduce abuse by narrow interests and minimize unintended consequences. Other tools should be considered for consulting with Californians on important local, regional and state issues.
 - In this era, economic opportunity and political involvement are mutually dependent. We can’t have a strong political democracy without a solid economic democracy; indeed, both rely on and support the other.

ABOUT CALIFORNIA FORWARD

California Forward was launched in 2008 with the support of five of California's leading foundations: The California Endowment, The Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

California Forward works to develop the best solutions through robust public discussions and by building broad coalitions that will support well-reasoned policy changes. Through this public interest approach, *California Forward* is rallying the ambition, innovation and optimism of Californians to overcome the distrust and partisanship that have thwarted previous attempts to bolster democracy.

FIRST STEPS

- 1. Budget process reform.** *California Forward* developed a set of fundamental budget reform principles designed to balance the budget, create stability, improve results, and restore voters' trust by applying the best practices from successful businesses and other states. The California Forward Action Fund then submitted to the Legislature the Best Practices Budget Accountability Act, which was based on the *California Forward* principles.
- 2. Empowering local governments.** This proposal would empower local governments by giving them control over local tax revenue while providing incentives for cities, counties and school districts to work together to address community needs, and let voters decide by majority vote whether to support them with additional sales tax. This proposal was submitted to the Legislature by the California Forward Action Fund as the Community Funding Protection and Accountability Act.

NEXT STEPS

Beginning in the spring of 2010, *California Forward* will convene a broad-based and nonpartisan dialogue among diverse Californians interested in identifying a shared vision for California's future and changes needed to promote healthy, safe and economically successful communities. This project will be an ongoing conversation involving an unprecedented number of Californians with the goal of generating practical, viable proposals that can transform how California is governed.



For more information, please visit www.caforward.org

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