

## **Will the last one to leave California please turn ON the lights**

California is a failed state and it is living in the darkness of its own delusional self-image. Its state and city governments actually believe that California is leading the way towards the adoption of a national identity that: 1. regards laws as suggestions, 2. rejects prudent budgeting, 3. embraces an 'anything goes' policy on morality, 4. condones drug use, 5. views those who defend religion as rubes, 6. favors the destruction of America's energy sector, 7. imposes restrictions on free speech, 8. allows abortion up the day of birth, 9. confiscates or severely restricts the use of firearms, and 10. destroys the economy with its Progressive attitudes on the environment and healthcare.

I have visited California a few times in my adult life. I have flown into San Francisco and Los Angeles airports and I have driven from its eastern boundary to its coastal highway and northwards. I have been amazed at its beauty and varied landscape and can understand why so many people moved there over the decades, but I can tell you one thing for sure...I will never, ever set foot on California soil again, nor will I cry so much as a crocodile tear for California until it comes to its senses and rejoins the rest of the United States where normal people live.

You may think that a bold or even ridiculous notion to have, but I was brought up in the Midwest where people can tell the difference between a good yarn and the bald truth. We are tough and often skeptical customers. Fast-talking snake oil salesmen usually head West to California to sell their wares, I guess because Californians are just plain, gullible. They buy homes on hillsides where mudslides are a yearly occurrence. They build houses near forests that get burned up by wildfires stoked by Santa Ana winds. AND they settle on earthquake fault lines.

They choose to live hours away from their jobs and get there on super-crowded highways that would make a train ride through central India seem like traveling on high-speed rail. Though their state's property taxes are only the eighth highest in the nation, their property taxes still average \$5,354 per dwelling. (Property taxes rose 4% on average across the U.S. last year, a rate that's outpacing inflation and that could mean more pain for all of us homeowners given a new cap on deducting state and local taxes. In 2018, property taxes on the nation's 87 million U.S. single family homes rose 4% to \$304.6 billion. That's an average of \$3,498 per home, according to a new report from ATTOM Data Solutions, which runs a property database.)

Property taxes are only one measure of the cost of living, but they do indicate what schools and city services cost. That includes funding long-term liabilities like municipal workers' pensions. Many of them are underfunded, proving that California governments and their voters were AWOL when economics was taught in their schools. The California Policy Center estimates that, "...California's total state and local government debt as of June 30, 2017 totaled just over \$1.5 trillion. That total includes all outstanding bonds, loans, and other long-term liabilities, along with the officially reported unfunded liability for other post-employment benefits (primarily retiree healthcare), as well as unfunded pension liabilities. This represents a rise of about \$200 billion – or 15% – over our last debt analysis, in January 2017. Our findings may appear to contradict reports that suggest a state budget surplus of about \$9 billion, but the state's spare cash and rainy day funds pale before the mountain of long-term liabilities that California governments at all levels have accumulated. Moreover, if the stock market drops, personal income tax and capital gains tax revenue will decline precipitously, wiping out these surpluses."

There is a myriad of ways the State is trying to shore up its finances, and gasoline tax is one of them. Most Californians pay over \$4.00/gal. according to AAA's statistics, and of that sum, about \$.47 goes to the state's coffers. Don't want to drive? Okay, but how about the other taxes? The combined sales tax rate for Los Angeles is 9.5%. This is the total of state, county and city sales tax rates. The California state sales tax rate is currently 6%. (The Los Angeles County sales tax rate is 0.25%.)

What about housing?

Think you might want to live in San Francisco? Before you call the movers think about this, the median sales price of a home there is \$1.3 million. Sure, it's all a question of supply and demand. I know, and San Francisco properties are in demand, that's true. I've visited San Francisco several times, but that was years ago. Today, I doubt if I could navigate between the drug addicts and other homeless people camped out on SF's streets, and as a Conservative Republican I wouldn't dream of living there. SF's current situation reminds me of a quote by General Philip Henry Sheridan talking about Texas; "If I owned both Texas and Hell, I'd live in Hell and rent out Texas." THAT sums up my feelings about California to a 'T'.

Before you get the idea that I think that all Californians are reprehensible, let me disabuse you of that assumption. I believe that there are and were many great Californians. Ronald Reagan was one, and he loved his adopted state. But that was before it turned so Blue that the oxygen that supplied its collective brain was cut off. I would guess that if RR were alive today he'd probably still be living there. He was, after all, a committed optimist, unlike myself.

Finally, for those Californians living without power due to Pacific Gas and Electric's power shut-off, I say, "Why worry? You've been living in the dark for so long anyway that it shouldn't make any difference to you. You always have the option of packing up and moving away. Just do me a favor before you do, scratch New Mexico off your list. We have enough of our own problems."

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