

The New Year Brings New Challenges for Taxpayers

Jon Coupal, President of Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

“There are better things ahead than any we leave behind,” wrote author C.S. Lewis, one of the many thoughts about how a New Year brings hope. As great as Lewis was, he wasn’t a California taxpayer in 2019.

Although it is true that most of us benefit from public services — at least in theory — too much of government today is about those who absorb taxpayer dollars for their own benefit versus those who are net tax payers. On the freedom side of the ledger are citizen taxpayers, property owners, business interests (at least those not invested in big public contracts) and other interests who believe that the best thing government can do for them is to leave them alone. For them, 2019 portends to be a rough year.

First, California’s incoming governor, Gavin Newsom, has already signaled that he will be far more willing to launch big new government programs. On the campaign trail, he promised both universal preschool and universal healthcare. Unfortunately, both would be universally expensive, costing in the tens of billions of dollars. As hard as it may be to imagine, taxpayers may soon be pining for the relatively more frugal Jerry Brown who, despite the Moonbeam image, managed to act as a bit of a deterrent to the unrestrained animal spirits in the California Legislature.

And speaking of the California Legislature, mere hours into the first session of the newly elected body, **Assembly Constitutional Amendment 1 (ACA 1) was introduced. If approved by voters, it would lead to billions in higher taxes.** It does this by reducing the existing constitutional requirement for a two-thirds vote for local special taxes and local bonds to 55 percent, a threshold that virtually guarantees that all such proposals will pass.

Although taxpayer advocates have had past success at preventing anti-Proposition 13 constitutional amendment proposals from clearing the Legislature, it is more than likely that, in 2019, it will be far more difficult.

November's election was horrific for taxpayers as the majority party, now populated with far-left progressives, secured more than a two-thirds vote in both the Assembly and the Senate. Under the state constitution, both state tax hikes and proposed constitutional amendments require a two-thirds vote. Simply stated, the super-super majority (should we call it a super-duper majority?) leaves California's beleaguered taxpayers more vulnerable than they have been in decades.

The only hope for taxpayers is that a handful of moderate Democrats will rise to stop California from sliding into a Venezuela-like confiscatory regime. How hard is it to find a moderate Democrat in the California Legislature? It might be easier to find Bigfoot.

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