



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on May 18, 2011

California Still a Mess Under Brown

Different ones of these three Browns have been the Democrat candidate for Governor of California eight times since 1958. Father Pat Brown was a two-term Governor who lost his bid for a third term to Ronald Reagan. Before running for Governor, sister Kathleen served as State Treasurer, which office would doubtless have provided her insight into the revenue shortfalls of the state. Jerry has held several state offices: Governor for two terms, Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Mayor of Oakland. On paper, he should have a great deal of experience in dealing with the state and local government budget crisis.



So one might ask why Jerry Brown did not begin his third term with more urgency to reduce the debt, more compromise with Republicans, and more candor with Californians. Instead, he applied Keynesian economics and *increased* government spending. The budget he proposed in January provided for \$84.6 billion in general revenue spending, later revised upward to \$88.8 billion. With a state population of 36.9 million, this means that the Governor's general revenue spending amounts to \$2,406 for every man, woman, and child in California. This figure does not include either local government spending or state spending from other sources. The total state and local government spending per year in the Golden State amounts to a staggering \$10,692 per state resident. Beyond that, state and local public debt is \$9,816 per person.

There are myriad methods by which Brown could reduce the size of his government, cut the crushing burden on taxpayers, and promote real economic growth. State employees who leave their jobs are entitled to be paid for unused leave, but California also places a limit on the number of hours that state employees are allowed to carry. That limit has been ignored. Some state workers are given huge sums of money for leave accrued which far exceeds what the state allows. A physician in the state correctional system, for example, received \$594,976 for his unused leave. A parole officer received \$268,990. Almost one-third of all state employees — 29 percent last year — accrued more leave time than they were entitled to, and were paid for all of it.

Governor Brown has also entered into new agreements with public-employee unions that provide more benefits than in the past, by allowing these employees to receive a lump sum upon retirement from state government based on their final pay rate, rather than on their pay rate when they accrued the leave. The new 200-page agreement with state prison guards also lifts an 80-day cap on the number of leave days a guard may accrue without losing excess leave. Nick Schroeder of the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office estimates that this change could provide these guards with an extra \$600 million. Even costlier, from the standpoint of California taxpayers, the new contract for prison guards gives them an extra nine days of leave per year. The contract, illustrative of the problems of a state government "negotiating" with the public-employee unions who elect their politicians, is full of such pandering. Under the prior contract, these employees received a \$130-a-month "physical fitness" bonus



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for passing certain standard criteria; however, all the new contract requires in order for public employees to receive their bonuses is simply a visit to a doctor to check their physical fitness.

Although public employees gobble up the vast majority of the state's expenditures, Brown has made no move to either reduce their compensation, limit the number of state government workers, or tighten the very soft pension and leave provisions of their contracts.

The Governor finds other villains. While helping public employees, he has cracked down on utilities by requiring them to generate 33 percent of their electrical power using so-called "renewable energy," despite the fact that these notional energy sources are more expensive than traditional methods of generating electrical power and that evidence shows that wind and solar power have not replaced any conventional power sources because of their intermittent supply. Furthermore, the energy bills of California businesses and residents are already a whopping 50 percent higher than the rest of the nation.

Taxpayers, also, are part of the problem, in Brown's mind. Republicans are fighting to prevent the extension of vehicle fees, sales tax rates, and personal income tax rates — enacted in the "emergency" of 2009 — which are due to end soon. They have proposed a 10-percent cut in the pay of public employees, which would allow the state to maintain services while honoring the promise of an only temporary tax hike made in 2009. California State Assemblyman Martin Garrick of Solana Beach explained the Republican position: "This plan creates a choice for Californians. Would you rather support a plan that protects education and public safety or a plan that grows government by 31%, [raises] \$55 billion in new taxes and puts priority on welfare programs?"

Brown has attacked taxpayer revolts such as the Proposition 13 ballot initiative more than 30 years ago which limited the property tax rate that homeowners could be compelled to pay. He has not proposed a general reduction in tax rates, which might bring back to California those productive citizens and businesses which have fled from the high-tax, high-regulation state to Arizona, Nevada, and Utah.

California is one of the most blessed spots on Earth. Its climate is temperate, and almost any plant or vegetable flourishes in its fertile valleys. Its beaches and picturesque coastlines are among the most enchanting in the world. Mountains and the ocean are only a few hours' drive from anywhere in the state. It has rich oil deposits, and could produce much of its needs by offshore drilling. Vital sectors of the American economy have chosen California as home — many of the world's largest technology corporations, for instance, are headquartered in Silicon Valley.

Yet the unchecked power of big government, backed by armies of well-entrenched state workers with outrageous compensation packages, may bring down even paradise.



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