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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

NOVEMBER 19, 2018

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20.11.2018

## ***What Can We Expect From the Democrat “Alternative” Given Their Record in California?***

Will the victories of the Democrats in 2018 be the beginning of a brighter and more hopeful period? One might have doubts given that large majorities of Democrats in both the House and Senate recently voted for a defense budget that is more than \$80 billion higher than the previous one, and higher than what was requested by the Trump regime.

Looking at what Democrats do when they are in power, as they have been in California during the last eight years, might reveal what they will do if they gain control of Congress and the Presidency in 2020. Since 2011, the Democrats have had close to total dominance of California’s politics—holding every executive office and having large majorities in both houses of its state legislature, a time when a simple majority vote in each body is needed to pass the state budget. Have California Democrats robustly funded public education, an issue presumably dear to the heart of supporters of the Democrats? No.

Among all states, in 2015-16, California ranked 41<sup>st</sup> in spending per K-12 student, 37<sup>th</sup> in spending as a share of the economy, and had the highest number of students per teacher in the nation.[1]

This is happening in a state that has been experiencing economic growth, and whose voters passed a tax bill in 2012 that was renewed in 2016 that the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) claims is raising some \$6 billion annually for public education and is supposedly preventing a “return to austerity.”[2] Furthermore, according to the former communications director of the CFT, this is a state that has “relatively strong education unions,” something that Democrats presumably support.[3]

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As the table below shows, funding for public education as a percent of the state budget has remained below where it was during Republican Schwarzenegger’s last four years as governor, a period that included the great recession. For fiscal year 2011-2012, the first budget passed when Brown was governor, spending on education dropped more than \$2.5 billion to 36.2% despite the size of the state budget increasing from the previous year. It reached a low point of 34.3% in fiscal year 2012-13. Since then, the percentage of education spending has been higher each year before abruptly declining in 2018-19.

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Total State Funds</b>	<b>K-12<sup>i</sup></b>	<b>Higher Ed</b>	<b>Education spending as a percent of the total state budget</b>
<u>Dollars in billions</u>				
2007-08	\$145.54	\$45.42	\$14.98	41.5%
2008-09	\$144.49	\$46.17	\$13.56	41.3%
2009-10	\$119.25	\$35.65	\$12.21	40.1%
2010-11	\$125.26	\$36.84	\$12.62	39.5%
2011-12	\$129.48	\$35.77	\$11.14	36.2%
2012-13	\$142.42	\$38.88	\$9.97	34.3%
2013-14	\$145.30	\$39.79	\$11.40	35.2%
2014-15	\$156.36	\$45.47	\$12.96	37.4%
2015-16	\$167.57	\$50.54	\$14.63	38.9%
2016-17	\$170.86	\$51.49	\$14.86	38.8%
2017-18	\$183.26	\$54.2	\$15.4	38%
2018-19	\$201.37	\$56.7	\$16.6	36.4% <sup>ii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> The true amount of money going to public education is less that what the table shows. Some of it now ends up in charter schools that, as of 2017-2018, [enrolled](#) over 620,000 students.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/home.php?> Go to select budget year and click enacted budget detail

While the total amount of money for education has gone up each fiscal year after Brown’s first year in office, the real amount spent has been eroded by inflation which has averaged about 2% a year. Additionally, the actual K-12 budgets have been further diminished by the increased amounts taken from the budget to finance the State Teacher’s Retirement System (CALSTRS).

Soon after Brown came to power as governor, what was labelled a crisis in CALSTRS was supposedly addressed by taking more money from schools and teachers to give to

CALSTRS. It resulted in most teachers being hit with a 2.25% pay cut as the deduction from their pay for CALSTRS that was 8% before July 2014 increased to 10.25% starting in July 2016

More significantly, schools must send an increasing amount of funds that match the pay of employees to CALSTRS. The matching percent has gone from 8.25% of teachers pay to 16.28% starting in July 2018 and is set to reach 19.1% beginning in July 2020.[6] This means that much of the recent increase in education funding ends up going into the retirement system (where it is invested into stocks and other financial instruments.) From 2014 to 2017, the employer contribution to CALSTRS went from \$2.27 to \$4.17 billion while the state contribution went from \$1.38 billion to \$2.48 billion.[7] Adding both together means that almost \$3 billion more of the money budgeted for education was sent to CALSTRS in 2017 than in 2014.

More money could be made available for public education. However, a bigger priority for the state Democrats has been to increase the budget for prisons. The budget item called Corrections and Rehabilitation went up by some two-thirds in a matter of six years when it increased from a little less than \$9 billion in 2012-13 to \$15 billion in 2018-2019.[8]

More money could be raised to properly fund public education and (to address the state's massive housing crisis.) An estate tax in California could be re-established as well as ending tax breaks that benefit the wealthy such as no taxes being imposed on their excessive wealth.

The state legislature needs a two-thirds majority to raise taxes, but despite the Democrats occasionally having such majorities in both houses of the state legislature during the last eight years, they have failed to reform Prop 13 that has for too many years resulted in corporations paying low property tax bills. The legislature has also failed to enact legislation that would result in taxing gas and oil production at the rate that is done in Texas. This failure leaves California with the dubious distinction of being "the only major oil-producing state that doesn't tax the goo as it's pumped from the earth. Yes, high-tax California,"[9] a state that is supposedly a leader in the fight against global warming and the burning of fossil fuels.

Given the Democrats recent record in California when they have been in power, their gaining greater power nationally in 2020 might end up disappointing many people who are hoping for a better world that tackles our serious problems that increasingly threaten the well-being of human beings.

**Notes.**

[1] Kaplan, Jonathan California's Support for K-12 Education is Improving, but Still Lags the Nation, January 2017 at

<https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/californias-support-k-12-education-improving-still-lags-nation/>

[2] See CFT publication California Teacher April-May 2018 pgs. 2, 13, 14 at <http://cft.org/californiateacher/141-news-publications/newsletters/cal-teacher/1579-california-teacher-april-may-2018.html> The pay of many teachers has not been keeping up with increases in the cost of living.

[3] Glass, Fred, United Effort of Striking Teachers and Parents Can Raise Pay, School Quality, San Francisco Chronicle, 4/14/2018 <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/A-united-effort-of-striking-teachers-and-parents-12833521.php>

[4] The true amount of money going to public education is less than what the table shows. Some of it now ends up in charter schools that, as of 2017-2018, enrolled over 620,000 students.

[5] <http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/home.php?> Go to select budget year and click enacted budget detail

[6] <https://www.calstrs.com/calstrs-funding-plan>

[7] <https://www.calstrs.com/sites/main/files/file-attachments/cafr2017.pdf> page 31 and <https://www.calstrs.com/sites/main/files/file-attachments/cafr2015.pdf> page 30

[8] See footnote 3

[9] Skelton, George, The time is ripe for a tax on oil extraction to pay for California road repairs, LA Times, 9/16/15