



The State of California, with the nation's largest economy and population, has one of the most challenging political environments of any state. The state's size and range of interests make policy problems unusually complex. The pace of change makes potential reforms obsolete before they are proposed. And the diversity of the population (income, age, ethnicity and geography) prevents the development of broad consensus in support of large-scale change. These factors have enforced a near-perpetual stalemate in statewide politics, reflected in budget battles in the Legislature and on the ballot. All this has created, and now perpetuates, a dysfunctional tax and fiscal system.

While there are many excellent efforts by particular social justice sectors at the local and state level, the kind of power needed to achieve systemic reform ultimately requires an integrated, cross-sector alliance of the progressive movement (community, labor, environmental justice, social justice) and sectors of the business community. In the absence of such a multi-sector approach, the tendency is for individual sectors to retreat into their own issue box, leaving the broader movement for social change weaker. The different sectors are often played off against one another in competition for pieces of a shrinking pie.

The California Alliance came together several years ago to address this need. The long-term goal of the California Alliance is to develop a progressive state alliance of organizations representing key issue sectors and strategic geographic regions of California, with agreement on a strategic state public policy agenda, and the collective power to win systemic reform.

Comprised of 16 member organizations, constituencies represented by Alliance groups include poor and working communities, African American, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander communities, immigrants, women, youth, people on public assistance, seniors, and low-income workers. Member organizations employed a broad range of strategies to pursue their work: grassroots community organizing, leadership development, policy research, public policy advocacy, and electoral campaigns.

Over the past five years the Alliance has convened a series of strategic discussions designed to strengthen understanding and relationship among key sectors of the social justice movement, and designed and implemented the Progressive Electoral Project, to build the civic engagement and voter education capacities of local groups. The project developed a comprehensive civic engagement training curriculum and trained the staff and grassroots leaders of scores of organizations who have in turn engaged and educated tens of thousands of voters throughout the state.

The work of the Alliance's environmental hub has blossomed into the dynamic new California Environmental Justice Alliance, and the tax and fiscal policies hub has pioneered work utilizing social values analysis in moving new constituencies to support progressive reform. This hub just completed three regional experiments engaging over 15,000 individuals in Los Angeles, San Jose, and Richmond California.

In 2009 the California Alliance launched an exciting new effort building on its work over the past five years. The Alliance voted to embrace the work of its tax and fiscal policies hub as its strategic focus over the next four years with the goal of undoing the major reactionary tenets of Proposition 13 and winning progressive tax and fiscal reform.

Three key strategies the Alliance will pursue are:

- ◆ Using the Social Values research and regional experiment results to significantly expand the base of support for progressive tax and fiscal reform statewide. Several key constituencies have been identified both in inner city communities and suburban/rural communities. Two prime targets are "Aspiring People of Color" and "Balanced Suburbans", both who vacillate between reactionary policies and progressive reform, and have very mixed values and worldviews on the role of government and taxes.

◆ Organizing a formal base of 500,000 occasional and new voters from the 3.9 million that voted in the November 2008 election. The Alliance has done a state power equation analysis and identified 500,000 voters as being the tipping point in closely contested state battles. In addition the Alliance identified 8 key regions of the state where these voters must be won.

◆ Constructing a state-of-the-art integrated voter engagement system that will exponentially increase the capacities of local groups to contact, educate, track, and follow up on voters. This system will include the use of new technologies such as internet-based integrated voter database systems, internet-based predictive dialing systems, social networking sites.

The Alliance has begun implementing these strategies to achieve three objectives over the next four years:

1. Achieving a 10% to 15% increase in consistent voter participation among low income residents, communities of color, immigrants, and youth in the “base” communities of the state that normally vote progressive but where the degree of the margins are decisive in the state power equation. These areas include Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay area, the South Bay (San Jose/Santa Clara County).

2. Shifting the balance of power in areas of the state where demographic trends should no longer support reactionary policies and leadership, but where the levels of community organization and civic engagement don't yet match the demographic shifts. To achieve such a shift requires moving 10 to 15% of voters who are the “contested middle” of the electorate between conservative and progressive policies.

Such shifts would dramatically change the statewide power equation in support of progressive reform. It would also significantly contribute to resolving the current stalemate in the California state legislature that requires a 2/3 majority for any significant policy changes. These areas include the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties), the Central Valley (Fresno, Kern, and Sacramento counties), San Diego and Ventura counties.

3. Bringing together a powerful bottom-up statewide alliance (of anchor organizations, regional coalitions and grassroots civic engagement networks) with statewide institutional players (organized labor, state advocacy groups, progressive elected officials, liberal foundations, and the business community) in a series of public policy campaigns that win systemic tax and fiscal reform, including undoing the major components of Proposition 13.

To date, the Alliance has organized itself around 12 regional anchor formations, welcoming Oakland Rising and the Equality Alliance in San Diego as new members. The Alliance launched a state-of-the-art integrated statewide voter engagement system in the Fall of 2010. The Alliance has also embarked on an ambitious fundraising effort to raise a budget of \$2 million a year over the next four years.

Given the current global economic crisis and the severe state budget crisis in California the California Alliance sees two possible roads:

One is **increased balkanization of the state** where inner city neighborhoods fight each other, urban communities fight suburban communities, and metropolitan regions fight rural regions. In addition to geographic competition throughout California, this scenario continues the debilitating fragmentation of the progressive movement with education, healthcare, the environment, jobs being played off against one another competing for pieces of a shrinking pie. This road is a continuation of the current policy gridlock in Sacramento preventing substantial progressive tax and fiscal reform.

A second possibility is a **new progressive majority alignment** fueled by new empowered constituencies consistently participating as substantive parts of the California electorate (young people, low income people, immigrants, people of color) and significant sections of the contested middle of the electorate who have been won over to a more progressive vision of the state through serious voter education efforts.

The Alliance believes that a powerful, bottom-up alliance in strategic regions of the state with a formal base of 500,000 occasional and new voters in support of progressive reform creates a new center of gravity for breaking through the current paralysis and short-term reactive tactics, and creates the possibility achieving truly systemic progressive reform.