

Gray Davis and Glen Becerra: Jack's legacy is state plan for recovery

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By Gray Davis and Glen Becerra Gray Davis is a former California governor and co-chairman of the Southern California Leadership Council. Glen Becerra is second vice president of the Southern California Association of Governments.

THE Southern California economy is huge. It employs millions of people across widely diverse industries. Understanding our many-sided economy is not easy, but finding our way on the road to economic recovery depends on it.

Maybe you knew that tourism and entertainment is our largest industry. Do you know that we are still the largest manufacturing center in the United States? Or that our region moves 40 percent of all waterborne trade into and out of the U.S. every day?

Do you know our unemployment rate is still at 12.4 percent? How about that Southern California, from Kern to Imperial counties, is the second-largest producer of crude oil in the continental United States and even grows 65 percent of our nation's winter vegetables? If you don't know these economic facts - well, maybe you don't know Jack.

Not that Jack, but Jack Kyser, the beloved chief economic advisor to the Southern California Association of Governments, who passed away suddenly last month. Jack saw the big picture of the Southern California economy and was skilled at communicating the serious business of job growth. With that understanding, Jack put his heart and mind into a recovery plan to drive every sector of the economy.

Jack's last call to action was heard earlier this month at the Road to Economic Recovery Summit, in conjunction with Southern California Association of Governments and the Southern California Leadership Council. His strategies for recovery come at a crucial time; this recession has already cost California 900,000 jobs.

Moreover, 2,565 businesses have recently left California for Texas, Utah, Arizona, Nevada and other states where newly elected governors are reportedly touting this trend as their latest recovery strategy.

Jack proposed a public works plan to simultaneously design and build infrastructure construction projects, along with public-private funding partnerships. This would speed public projects and cost taxpayers less.

He also proposed business-friendly initiatives to generate faster, stronger job growth in the public and private sectors.

Most importantly, Jack was well aware of the red tape holding back California's recovery. For that reason, he advocated urgent legislation granting the governor the ability to respond to sustained high unemployment using the same emergency powers as in natural disasters.

These powers would be strictly limited by the Legislature's ability to reverse any act by a two-thirds vote, and only remain in effect until state unemployment is 7percent or lower.

Jack was not beholden to politics, business or labor but instead always had our economy's best interest in mind. In recognition of our friend Jack's knowledge and wisdom, we endorse his economic recovery plan. In our time of recession, we cannot simply hope to hold on to the industries and jobs we currently enjoy. We need an approach that truly puts California first by taking action to attract jobs, speed public works projects and increase business investment in our communities. We think you'll agree - if you know Jack.