

Opinion: Education cuts shortchange future of all Californians

By Mark Paul

When pollsters ask, most of us say California is going in the wrong direction. We've been saying so, with the rare exception, for almost a decade. So we have to consider an unhappy possibility: California, after trekking off-course for so long, may have crossed over into unfamiliar and dangerous territory. Call it the State of the Dimming Dream.

Not everyone agrees, of course, on what's wrong. To some of us, California remains a place of bloated government, rampant spending on the poor and punishingly high taxes. As is so often the case in a state where change is the only constant, the old stories lag behind the news and the numbers. A generation ago, when graybeards like me were starting out, California rivaled New York as a high-tax state. No more.

The top personal income tax rate is lower than when some fellow named Ronald Reagan was governor. The corporate tax has been cut and the code turned into a Swiss cheese of credits and exemptions. The estate tax has been abolished. Proposition 13 cut and capped property tax rates and limited reassessments. The vehicle license fee has been halved. The sales tax rate is higher but its yield has fallen because the items on which it is levied – mostly tangible goods – make up a declining slice of our consumption.

So it should be no surprise that the budget fight this year in Sacramento is not over whether state government will be big or small. It's about whether the state government will be small or smaller.

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