

Opinion: California is more bust than boom

By Ted Gaines

Ebola, landslide elections, immigration and Ferguson have dominated the holiday season news, and those massive stories have obscured a host of other events that augur poorly for the future of California unless we act to change the way we govern this state. It's the problems related in these stories that inspired me to write "CA-Boom! California's Amazing Past, Troubled Present and Unlimited Future".

These stories lost among the mega-events are not new – they are continuations of troubling California trends – and I tackle them all in my book and address how they can make or break our state moving forward. Here's a sampling:



Ted Gaines

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) will become insolvent in 2016 unless the federal government slashes benefits, raises taxes, changes eligibility, or takes all three of those steps. In my book I discuss the staggering growth of disability payments and how expanding entitlements affect the workforce. But most important to our long-term future, I ask the question: If jobs are getting physically less demanding, and medical care is getting better, then why are fewer and fewer people able to work? What does that mean for California in the decades to come? If you've ever had a

sense of unease about SSDI, check out “CA-Boom!” to see some numbers that will validate every fear you’ve ever had. Here’s a hint – it’s worse than you think.

The free-market Cato Institute recently issued a “fiscal report card” of all 50 governors. Gov. Jerry Brown was dead last and it wasn’t close. Despite his claims of austerity and a beneficial action here and there, Brown’s spending increases over the past three years are more than double the national average. That’s unsustainable. And because spending equals future taxes, Brown’s expansion will put pressure on government to wring more out of every taxpayer. “CA-Boom!” looks at our tax burden and shows why increasing taxes, at least in this state, could be a disaster.

Proposition 47, recently passed by the California voters, will dump thousands of criminals onto the streets, supposedly non-violent and low-risk offenders who shouldn’t be in prison at all. I take a look at some data and conclude one thing: It’s hard to end up in prison. In 2011 there were nearly 400,000 felony arrests in California. How many of those people saw the inside of a prison cell? My book tells you, and I bet the number is much, much smaller than you think.

I also examine innovation and its role in the California economy; our crumbling infrastructure; and why our schools cost so much and return so little. There are charts in the book about education spending and educational achievement that will make you rethink every call for more money in our schools. I look at how our energy policy could supercharge our economy but instead drags it down and other issues critical to the health of the Golden State.

It’s obvious that California has enough problems for 10 states, but what defines us is hope, hope that we can recapture our glorious economic past. Everything in the book is discussed in the context of our state’s rich Gold Rush history. In it I ask: “What would happen if John Marshall

dipped his hand into the American River today and pulled out that same brilliant sparkle? Nothing. No Gold Rush. No mass migration. No inventions. No progress. Nothing. California's current government would kill off a new Gold Rush before it started."

We've fallen a long way from the freewheeling, risk-taking spirit that fueled the most amazing economic spectacle the world has ever seen. But that is the government's fault, not the people's. However, with the right policies, we can unlock the potential in today's California and turn the state back into the Gold Rush dream that pulled people from around the world to our shores.

Sen. Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.