

Opinion: Legislative concerns for 2016

By Ted Gaines

Jan. 1 marks the New Year and also the day that hundreds of new California laws go into effect. In addition to the changes those laws are supposed to bring, there are other changes on the horizon that could signal a dramatically different state.

2016 is a general election year and numerous initiatives may make it onto the ballot.



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Marijuana could effectively become legal in our state if voters decide to back one of the numerous cannabis-related measures that are in the process of qualifying. I've never supported legalizing marijuana or other drugs and think it would be terrible for our state. I've heard heartbreaking stories from many of my friends and constituents about how drugs have torn apart their families and ruined young lives. I don't think we should be doing anything to make it easier for young people to be getting marijuana or any drug, and I'm afraid that's what would happen if we legalize and culturally normalize marijuana.

From the "I told you so" department, there will also be attempts this year to extend parts of the "temporary" taxes championed by Gov. Jerry Brown in Proposition 30. There is

nothing more permanent than a temporary tax, and these efforts to string out Prop. 30 prove that. Remember that the state took in billions in unanticipated revenues last year, but even that isn't enough to satisfy the big government crowd.

There is yet another initiative that could put more criminals back out onto the street before their sentences are up by changing our Three Strikes law again, which would make our neighborhoods less safe. I opposed Gov. Brown's "realignment" plan and the pro-crime Proposition 47, and I don't want to see any more soft-on-crime policies that put our families at risk.

Those are just some examples of big changes that could be coming to our state soon, and it's not much of an agenda for our state – higher taxes, more drugs and more crime. I know that I'll be seeing the same set of ideas coming through the Legislature. I will be fighting against it all so that California taxpayers and families aren't stressed any further.

Last year I tackled a fairly new issue to California that is only going to become more important in the years to come. Drones are amazing tools and toys that have incredible applications that are only now becoming widespread. But they can also do great harm when they interfere with public safety, invade our privacy, or aid in terrorist attacks.

I built a strong, bipartisan coalition for my drone bills last session, bills that would have protected citizens and emergency responders, schoolchildren, and our prison guards and prisoners themselves.

Unfortunately, in spite of the need for these bills and the bipartisan coalition behind them, the governor vetoed them all. But the drone problems are not going away and I'm not giving up. I'll be introducing those same bills this year and also tackling drone use over critical infrastructure as well as "drone stalking," where someone uses a drone to harass, stalk or violate a restraining order.

As always, this legislative session I will be fighting to keep taxes down and to keep a tight lid on state spending, and looking for ways to make California the best place for businesses to prosper. A powerful, job-creating private sector will do more for this state than any legislation and I want to make sure that government doesn't get in the way of prosperity.

Stay tuned for more information on all of these issues this year. Until then, I want to wish each and every one of you a Happy New Year!

Ted Gaines represents the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin in the state Senate.