

Opinion: Why Nevada should get hitched—to California

By Joe Mathews

Dearest Nevada,

Marry me.

And not in a chapel off the Strip. I, California, want a real grown-up marriage with you, Nevada.



Joe Mathews

Look how much we already have in common. I'm the Golden State; you're the Silver State. More than 90 percent of your people live within an hour of my eastern border. And, 1 in 5 Nevadans was born in California. That may not seem like many, but only 1 in 4 Nevadans was born in Nevada.

Together, the two of us are a place apart from today's America. The United States is increasingly mean, judgmental and isolationist. But you and I prefer entertaining to judging. We can't get enough foreigners and tourists. We're both tolerant of deviancy and sin (though I can get a little uptight about greenhouse gases).

All of which is why we'd both be better off as one merged state.

Right now, rich people and companies play us against each

other, and we both end up poorer. Recently, you—feeling needy and desperate—gave \$750 million in taxpayer money to the owner of pro football's Oakland Raiders for a new stadium in Las Vegas. Building a football stadium is a terrible investment (a Stanford economist called it the worst stadium deal for a city he'd ever seen), and the money will come from a hotel tax that currently funds transportation and schools.

Before that, you gave billions in tax and other incentives to Tesla to locate a battery factory there. Deals like these leave both of us worse off—we lose a business, and you gain huge liabilities you can't afford.

It's similar to the problem of rich Californians avoiding income taxes by establishing nominal residence in Nevada, which doesn't have them. You don't get a cut of their income, and we lose money we need to educate our people.

Eliminating destructive economic competition between us is only part of what we could do for each other.

Look at you. Your economy has been lagging the country because it's far too reliant on tourism and real estate. But my extraordinarily diverse economy, which has been outperforming the rest of the country, could help support yours. You desperately need a better-educated populace; if you married me, your kids could more easily go to my terrific public university systems.

In return, you'd bring me more of the young people that you've been better at attracting than me. Perhaps you could share your secret of how to build enough housing for young families. You also could inspire me to exercise the old pro-business libertarian ethos that helped me thrive, but has sagged in recent decades.

Politically, I see you as a natural ally in my biggest fight: against the president of the United States. Trump, more of an Atlantic City guy than a Vegas guy, wants to turn you into a

nuclear dump by reviving the Yucca Mountain proposal for storing nuclear waste. As for California, the president has called my elections massive frauds, and threatened to defund the entire state if I don't sign onto his dumbest and most xenophobic policies.

Trump fans with ties to the Russia have encouraged the #Calexit movement to separate me from the U.S. And Trump's buddy Nigel Farage, who led the Brexit movement, is now working in California on a proposal to split me into pieces. Divide and conquer is what Trump wants. That's why you and I have to unite and fight back.

I can feel your hesitation. You may fear there'd be an imbalance in a marriage—I have 40 million people, and you have less than 3 million. But don't worry; I'll take care of you. You'll find that you have the same great deal as the rest of inland California. You'll be subsidized by all the taxes paid by California's rich coastal people, while retaining the right to make fun of those same rich people's many excesses.

Remember: we've already done great things together—Burning Man (you host, I send my people), cleaning up Lake Tahoe, reviving Britney Spears' career. Las Vegas and Los Angeles—two entertainment capitals—are more deeply intertwined than any two American cities across state lines. Vegas is the leading source of new out-of-state residents of L.A. (It's no accident that the great L.A. movie of this era, "La La Land," turns on two Nevada-California drives—Emma Stone's return to her suburban Clark County home, and Ryan Gosling's decision to pick her up there, and drive her back to L.A. for an audition.)

And I hate to go negative, but do you really have other options? Utah is an attractive neighbor, I'm sure, but she won't marry you unless you convert.

And if our marriage doesn't work? No worries. You and I are

both no-fault divorce states. So we'd just go back to being friends.

All my love,

California

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.