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California Policy Options

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Introduction

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Introduction

In the midst of California's current economic boom, it might be asked if the state really has any lingering issues of public concern. But clearly such issues remain, even in the best of times. In this volume for the year 2000, we devote attention to issues and challenges that have long-term significance to the state.

The state's population is growing through domestic migration, foreign immigration, and natural increase. At the least, this trend is posing important questions relating to housing and infrastructure, as Tom Lieser points out in his opening chapter. Even the *Census of Population* itself has become a matter of controversy. Xandra Kayden notes the connection between the Census and the distribution of likely political power in the 21st century in her essay.

Fiscal decisions of the voters from the last quarter of the 20th century will continue to haunt the 21st. As Eileen Roush and Philip Romero report, the legacy of direct democracy applied to state fiscal affairs has been, perhaps inadvertently, concentrated power in Sacramento. Thus, to the extent that infrastructure and educational decisions are vital to California's growing population, key decisions will be made at the state level, with local government playing a lesser role. Past voter decisions on crime and incarceration are closely entwined with fiscal affairs because of the high cost of prison construction and administration. But as Mark Kleiman notes in his chapter, alternatives exist to current policies that may foster deterrence more effectively.

As the state's population grows, so must its employment opportunities. High-tech job creation and enticement is the goal of governmental authorities throughout the nation and, indeed, the world. Often, the presence of major universities in California has been credited with the state's success in developing a high-tech industry. Werner Hirsch observes, however, that care must be taken in fostering direct university-industry relationships. Such relationships must be clearly defined to have the desired effect.

One of the key demographic trends in California is the increasing proportion of Latinos. Many Latinos are at the lower end of the income scale and therefore, as E. Richard Brown documents, lack health insurance coverage. New federal-state programs, however, will permit an increase in the coverage rate although universal medical coverage remains out of reach.

Currently, the California Latino population is relatively youthful and it is children who are especially targeted by the new health programs Brown describes. However, as Fernando Torres-Gil, Valentine M. Villa, and Mayda Portillo remind us, a population with a relatively young average age still has many elderly constituents. Moreover, today's young Latinos will be tomorrow's seniors – with the needs and political demands that such maturation inevitably entail.

In any event, the rising proportion of Latinos in the labor market raises a variety of concerns as social policy shifts away from traditional “welfare” and toward encouragement of employment. Rosina Becerra cites a variety of policy issues that particularly affect Latinos including basic education and training programs and developing English-language skills. Such programs and skill development will influence the quality of jobs obtained.

In short, the current prosperity should not mask longer-term structural challenges for California. Indeed, a period of prosperity represents an opportunity to meet such challenges. The UCLA Anderson Business Forecast is again pleased to co-sponsor this annual volume on *California Policy Issues* with the School of Public Policy and Social Research.

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