

Preface

Whether the issue is property tax reform, affirmative action, bilingual education, or the rise of HMOs, California has long been regarded as a harbinger of issues that come to dominate national policy debates. The sheer size of its increasingly globalized economy, its strategic position on the Pacific Rim and on the Mexican border, its remarkable cultural and ethnic diversity, and its willingness to embrace new ideas all contribute to its unique role as a trendsetter. The great challenge facing policy makers in California – whether on the local, regional, or state level, in the public, private or non-governmental sectors – is to anticipate the import of these issues before they make their appearance on the national agenda.

The UCLA Anderson Forecast and the California Policy Options program of the UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research combine to help policy makers do just that. The forecast provides an expert appraisal of how the California economy can be expected to perform during the coming year. The Policy Options program provides a kind of over-the-horizon policy radar, which identifies not only critical policy issues that state and local leaders will likely face, but provides a balanced and incisive analysis of those issues. The result, we believe, is an effective mix of information and analysis that will enable decision makers to immediately begin acting on, rather than reacting to, emerging public issues of significance.

The following chapters address a wide range of issues, from water policy and international trade to affirmative action, the important role of transportation in welfare reform, and wedge issues in state politics. This broad scope reflects not only California's complexity, but also the interdisciplinary mission and expertise of the School of Public Policy and Social Research. Founded in 1994, the School is a leader in creating a new paradigm in policy education, research, and action. Our distinctive approach emphasizes solving problems across boundaries, particularly at the growing intersection between the public, private, and non-governmental sectors. It is a mode of problem solving ideally suited to the challenges facing us in California today.

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