Fixing California
Using the 2010 Campaign for Governor to make the change we need
The University of Southern California is working in partnership with The Los Angeles Times and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to develop and oversee an eighteen-month project called “Fixing California”, designed to outline the public policy challenges facing the state, as well as convene and lead a series of public discussions on these topics. As two of the state’s premier civic institutions, USC, the Times and SCAG are uniquely positioned to bring together political, business, community, policy and advocacy leaders to participate in this project. By timing the project to coincide with the 2010 California gubernatorial campaign, we can draw in elected leaders and candidates from both major parties as well, providing the next governor and other local, state and federal officials with a blueprint to move forward when the next administration takes over in January of 2011.

The focus of such a program would not be limited simply to state government and legislation, but rather take on the regional and international policy necessities that Los Angeles faces as a result of our unique geographic, demographic, cultural and professional standings. By leading a necessary discussion on issues such as trade, immigration, environmental, technological, and diplomatic matters, the “Fixing California” project can re-establish Los Angeles as the unofficial capitol of the Pacific Rim. By addressing local and regional concerns through cooperative efforts with those individuals and organizations who represent the wide-ranging interests that populate the Southland, we can set an example for the nation’s other largest metropolitan areas on the benefits of cooperative action.

CONFERENCE SERIES

The conference series would involve arranging a series of day-long conferences to take place over the course of 2010 in which Southern California’s most influential leaders gather to discuss potential solutions to the state’s and region’s challenges. A series of six conferences would take place on a semi-monthly basis throughout the year, beginning with a broader overview of economic and job creation issues in February and culminating in December with a similar overview in which the state’s newly elected governor and other statewide, local, county, and legislative officials would be presented with the results of the year’s work and encouraged to use these findings as part of their 2011 governing agenda.

A BLUEPRINT FOR CALIFORNIA

USC faculty and Times reporters, in partnership with existing institutions would collaborate on a series of policy reform handbooks from which participants in the “Fixing California” conferences could draw. While the civic leaders and policy experts who would participate in the conferences would obviously be asked to present their own thinking as well, these handbooks could serve as a basis from which the individual discussions could begin. Similarly, the participants in this aspect of the project would be charged with compiling and analyzing the material presented at the conferences, in order to ensure that a lasting record and overview of the presentations would be available moving forward.
The combination of these two elements, as well as the USC-Times Poll, will create a work product that will gradually develop as the result of ongoing discussion and debate throughout the year and result in a tangible product that will serve as the basis for further public and private sector policy reform. Too often, these types of gatherings are forgotten by the time the participants return home the following day. Our goal is much more ambitious: to build a foundation from which California’s leaders can construct a lasting infrastructure of change.

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The growing public disenchantment with California’s political leadership and overall direction provides an ideal opportunity for the state’s civic leadership to step into the void and direct a necessary conversation about California’s future. The platform of a campaign for governor ensures an even higher level of public and media interest and potential political impact. USC is uniquely positioned to join with the Times to seize this opportunity. We should do so.