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Union-Tribune Editorial

## Saving jobs

### Fix California's unfriendly business climate

May 19, 2003

When Buck Knives pulls out of El Cajon next year and moves its manufacturing operations to business-friendly Idaho, 270 of San Diego's dwindling number of manufacturing jobs will be gone. By now, that's getting to be an all-too-familiar story.

As Union-Tribune staff writer Mike Freeman wrote last week, San Diego has lost 11,400 manufacturing jobs since January 2001. That's a 9.5 percent drop in manufacturing employment. California has lost about 260,000 industrial jobs in that same 29-month period, a 14.1 percent drop.

There are multiple causes for California's loss of jobs, including a weak national economy and the lure of off-shore manufacturing in Asia and Latin America. But there is clear, abundant evidence that California's increasingly hostile business climate is driving jobs out of state.

Unreformed workers' compensation, expensive electricity, high taxes and fees, health-care mandates and ever more government regulations all add to the burdens of doing business in California. Add California's typically high costs for land and housing and the burdens grow even heavier.

As California should have learned in the early 1990s when the state lost some 900,000 mostly manufacturing jobs, other, more competitive states are happy to gain at our loss. That means California must remain economically competitive with Western states whose tax, labor and energy costs are all significantly lower than those in California.

But is anybody in Sacramento listening?

The California Legislature, lopsidedly controlled by Democrats, is currently considering more than 100 bills that would penalize employers and add to the cost of doing business in this state. Gov. Gray Davis, belatedly alarmed by California's loss of jobs, is offering reforms he says will save \$1.5 billion in workers' compensation costs.

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What's lacking in Sacramento, however, and certainly in the tax-happy Legislature, is any coherent strategy or sense of urgency for addressing California's job-killing disincentives.

Fortunately, some help is on the way. California's fed-up business community is banding together to save California jobs. A Coalition for California Jobs is launching a statewide campaign to oppose harmful legislation, and to hold state legislators politically accountable for votes that kill jobs or discourage job creation.

The coalition includes a who's-who of the state's business groups: the California Chamber of Commerce, the California Business Roundtable, the California Manufacturers and Technology Association, California Taxpayers' Association, California Retailers Association, American Electronics Association and others.

A decade ago, then -Gov. Pete Wilson's competitiveness task force, led by entrepreneur Peter Ueberroth, helped stem the tide of jobs leaving California. While the business coalition urges common sense on the Legislature, Gray Davis should follow Pete Wilson's example, and do so now.



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