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Daniel Weintraub: Davis has the right focus, but his goal is modest

By **Daniel Weintraub -- Bee Columnist**
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The inauguration of Gov. Gray Davis to a second term Monday might as well have been declared a substance-free zone. The governor's brief speech, as these things often are, was long on generalities but short of specifics. Californians will have to wait until later in the week to hear exactly what Davis has in mind for the next four years.

The one important detail the governor did dribble out was curious, to say the least. He declared it his goal to nudge the state's economy into creating 500,000 new jobs over the next four years. That might sound ambitious at first blush. But if the state meets the governor's goal and does not exceed it, California will be in very, very bad shape when Davis leaves office in 2006.

By historical standards, 125,000 jobs per year would be a pittance. Over the past 10 years, the state has added an average of about 240,000 jobs annually. And the governor's own Finance Department has projected that the population of Californians between the ages of 20 and 64 -- the adult labor force -- will grow at about 290,000 per year for the next decade.



Editorial: How hard a landing?

Water officials describe what has just happened to California as the dreaded "hard landing." After the Imperial Valley proved unable to come to terms with the rest of Southern California over the Colorado River (the region's largest water source), the federal government suddenly and drastically reduced California's take. Now urban Southern California has only a two-year supply of reliable water. After that, all bets are off.

Editorial: A rarity in Kenya

What has long been taken for granted in Western democracies remains a rarity in much of the world: the peaceful transfer of power via a democratic election. But that has just happened in Kenya.

Letters to the editor: Importing doctors

Re "Bush move expected to ease shortage of rural doctors," Dec. 22: Importing foreign physicians is a bad idea and un-American.

Daniel Weintraub: Davis has the right focus, but his goal is modest

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Editorial: Fueling the test

Compared to the past year, when the state has seen virtually no net job growth, 125,000 new positions would be great. Still, the governor's stated goal would leave half of the state's additional working people without a job during his second term.

Numbers aside, Davis' recognition that jobs and the economy trump all else is healthy. When it comes down to it, the state government should probably be truly focused on two things: making it easier for the economy to create high-paying jobs, and preparing Californians to fill them. As Davis said well, everything else flows from there.

"Every dream begins with a job," the governor said in his speech. "And every new job elevates our economy. Jobs are the financial engine for better schools, safer streets, affordable health care and a cleaner environment. Without them, we cannot invest in our people or their dreams."

Elsewhere in his address, Davis hinted at the priorities he will be filling out in his State-of-the-State speech Wednesday and his budget proposal on Friday. He said he wants to nurture small business, to support California's vibrant biotechnology industry, to position California to be America's "arsenal for homeland security."

It's debatable whether the governor really can do much to create new jobs on his own. Davis wants to train more nurses and help the disabled gain employment. He wants to accelerate spending on infrastructure to pour several billion dollars into the economy. No harm there. But any government stimulus will be a small factor in the state's \$1 trillion economy.

Indirectly, though, state policies probably do have an effect, and Davis would do well to focus his attention on creating an atmosphere friendly to job creation.

First on his list should be the continued reform of California's schools, so that the young people graduating from high school and college can take a job without first needing remedial training from their employers. Although the task is unfinished, this is probably the one area in which Davis excelled in his first term.

The governor could also do more to encourage the construction of housing. High housing costs are one of the major reasons companies don't move to California, or choose to expand elsewhere. The state is never going to compete with Nevada and New Mexico on housing affordability, but the supply of housing could grow more rapidly if local governments would remove some of the impediments to building new homes. And that would relieve some of the pressure that is pushing prices up.

Roads are another crucial issue. If employees can't get to their jobs and companies cannot move their goods around the state, businesses are going to continue to look to other states when they need to expand. The state needs to think of some creative ways to more efficiently use the roads we have, because it is going to be very difficult, and very expensive, to add capacity to our freeway system, especially in urban areas.

The cost of employee benefits is also rising fast in California. Workers compensation, which provides insurance for those injured on the job, is soaring as a cost of doing business. Regular health insurance premiums are also increasing at a double-digit clip. At a minimum, the state should commit itself to doing nothing that will increase the price of either product. Anything the government can do to reduce the cost of those benefits would be a bonus.

Finally, there is the question of stability. Two key resources that every employer

debate

Get ready for the latest "last word" in the debate over high-stakes testing for schoolchildren.

'Stakeholders': Special interests in sheep's clothing?

We've all read about it in their press releases: local, state and federal governments furiously working to collaborate with us - the public - on important issues. That's noble. But wait. Read those press releases more closely. They're not collaborating with us - the public - but with what are called "stakeholders." It's all the rage. Government agencies scramble to set up stakeholder groups, stakeholder advisory panels, stakeholder this and stakeholder that.

Letters to the editor: Credit Joe Sullivan

Re "Did Joe guard the dough?", editorial, Dec. 27: While properly noting Joe Sullivan's many contributions to the Northridge water board and the Sacramento community generally, The Bee suggests that Sullivan didn't do enough - as a single member of the board of directors -- to clamp down on the expenses of other board members.

Editorial: A time for great things

On Monday, Gray Davis will take the oath of office for a second term as California's governor. Here's a speech he's welcome to use:

Editorial: Little films, big box office

Here is a shred of consolation to any moviegoer who has sat through trailers for upcoming first-run blockbusters and felt a sad sort of wonder that people would pay money to see such big-budget dreck: In the year that just ended, the little films often proved the most profitable.

Letters to the editor: The only way

Re "Universal teachings," Your views, Dec. 25: Most religions teach about love. What one comes to realize when one studies the teachings of Jesus is that he did not point to the "way." He said he is the "way." In John 14:6, he specifically says, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." While some may say that this is exclusive, and narrow, it is either true or not. A person can accept Jesus' sayings or turn from them. The wonder of what he taught is that he backed up his words

depends upon -- electricity and water -- are in flux right now. And the state's financial condition, with a shortfall the governor has estimated at \$35 billion, has got to put a chill into anyone thinking of opening up shop in California. It's imperative that the governor instill confidence that all three of these long-term problems are under control.

with actions, by going to the cross. There is no greater love than Jesus laying down his life for his friends.

Davis said he will bring an "intense, unshakable focus" to this task. Let's hope he is serious.

About the Writer

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