

BizFed Members,

Reuniting in person for **Political Forecast** was no easy feat. But the energy at the Herald Examiner Building and the conversations it sparked made all the planning, coordinating, and strict adherence to public health protocol worth it. For those who couldn't attend, I'd like to offer some key takeaways on the wealth of intel our speakers shared. Happy reading!



PANEL 1: GUBERNATORIAL RECALL LESSONS

- *A good storyteller can change minds, policies, and power dynamics.*
- *Consensus on how or whether to reform California's recall laws may never be reached.*
- *The changing role of technology in our everyday lives will continue contributing to political power shifts and social movements that command the attention of elected officials.*



The first panel of Political Forecast 2021 examined how the kaleidoscope of issues that fueled efforts to recall Gov. Gavin Newsom have crystallized into a narrative about the pitfalls of living in California. The recall was defeated but horror stories about homelessness, crime, housing unaffordability, and California's unfriendly business environment continue captivating audiences across party lines. Moderator **Seema Mehta**, a Los Angeles Times political writer, asked if there's a counter narrative that Democrats can embrace to combat growing fear and frustration among Californians.

The solution is simple – and has more to do with action than words – responded panelist **Darry Sragow**, a veteran political strategist, attorney, and publisher of California Target Book. We need more jobs; widespread disaffection spurred by job loss is not unique to California or the Democratic Party. We also need to understand how the loss of privacy perpetuated by social media and smart phones fueled the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, social unrest over the murder of George Floyd, and anger over Newsom's appearance at a restaurant dinner party during the pandemic. Leaders need to get ahead of stories told by disaffected constituents.

Panelist **Ace Smith**, a veteran political strategist and Bearstar Strategies partner, pointed to "hateful, divisive" rhetoric sowed by former President Donald Trump. Job creation is only part of the solution to a "way more complex, scary problem," he said. Smith foresees a day of reckoning over Trump's story about stolen votes but warned the audience to prepare for a "messy" period before the inevitable realignment of the Electoral College. Jobs alone will not diffuse the hate and division fueling politics today.

Panelist **Courtni Pugh**, partner at Hilltop Public Solutions and Newsom's political director against the recall, highlighted the impact of character-driven storytelling in politics. By characterizing the recall election as "an attack on us" (and borrowing strategies from Wisconsin that nationalized the former governor's action on unions), her team was able to shift the focus from individual antics to broader ideas about who we are and what we stand for as a state. Zooming out when the opposition is zeroing in can help voters put headline-grabbing issues into perspective.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION: INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS



Jon Switalski, Executive Director of the Rebuild SoCal Partnership, emphasized how record infrastructure investments alone will not guarantee California a trained workforce or continued standing in a globally competitive environment. We must address our acute inability to build affordable housing if we want to recruit and hold on to skilled workers. We have to go beyond securing competitive grants for infrastructure projects; we should seek to ensure that construction workers we hire to complete the projects can afford to house their families in California.

PANEL 2: POLICIES & POLITICS SHAPING THE 2022 MIDTERMS

- *Regional power is determined by civic engagement. Your vote and voice make a difference.*
- *Every good panel should have a "Joe Manchin" sitting in the middle if eye-opening conversation, rather than consensus, is the goal.*
- *Data, data, data!*



The second panel of Political Forecast 2021 presented left, right, centric, and broad-based perspectives on how the 2022 midterms are likely to play out. Moderator **Don Polese**, founder and managing partner of Vectis DC (and the only speaker to travel from Washington, D.C. for the event) led a wide-ranging discussion about whether 2022 will "buck the trend" or stay the course, and how new strategies and investments will modernize this election cycle.

Historically, midterm elections tend to see the president's party lose seats in Congress. Do we foresee this happening in 2022? **Ajay Mohan**, executive director of the Orange County Democratic Party, answered with a resounding "NO." With the future of democracy at stake, Mohan is confident that investments in long-term constituent outreach will result in robust Democratic turnout in 2022. He's keenly aware of the importance of targeted, on-the-ground voter mobilization in politically divided Orange County, especially among younger, more diverse, and more liberal voters.

Panelist **Ellie Hockenbury**, deputy executive director and communications director for the California Republican Party, painted a decidedly different picture of the 2022 political landscape. She's "much happier" to be a Republican than a Democrat heading into the midterms, she declared, insisting the GOP is in a "competitive place" in the Golden State. Hockenbury also presented the gubernatorial recall defeat through a rosy lens. It gave Republicans valuable new voter insight, spurring data-driven constituent conversations and empowering the party to build a "ground game" for 2022, she said.

Panelist **Joe Mathews**, editor and columnist at Zócalo Public Square/Arizona State University, zeroed in on a pattern even more pervasive than the trend of midterm seat loss for the president's party. The vast majority – he estimates 80-90% – of politicians shaping public narratives are stuck talking about the past. But the political appeal of nostalgia loses its rosy glow when the new reigning party can't deliver on its promise of a return to better times, setting the cycle into motion again. "Remember when we were in power and things were better?" Let's stop living in the past, come to terms with the present, and look ahead to building a brighter future instead of longing for regression. And let's stop letting the Bay Area outvote us!

SPECIAL PRESENTATION: LAND USE ISSUES IN 2022



Ryan Ole Hass, past president of Greater Los Angeles REALTORS, ticked off his top three land use issues to watch in 2022: property rights, taxes, and more taxes. He urged the business community to stay on high alert for efforts to dismantle Proposition 13 (a landmark measure that limits property tax increases), sneaky attempts to pass vacancy taxes without taxpayer input, and proposals such as property transfer tax hikes that further erode property rights. Together, we have the power to keep these measures at bay. It's already tough enough to live, work, and own a home in California.

PANEL 3: LOS ANGELES REGION REDISTRICTING IMPACTS

- *The principled approach is always the right approach.*
- *There are winners and losers in every redistricting process. Prepare for the tables to turn, unless you're a political consultant.*
- *Long-term, micro-local mobilization is key to ensuring the business community has representation on regional boards.*



No matter what stories you tell and where you fall on the past-present-future or right-center-left spectrums, things will shift. The only constant in politics is change: the transformation of constituent demographics, the reshuffling of voter priorities, and the redrawing of district boundaries. The third and final panel of Political Forecast 2021 explored how redistricting processes are tied to the health of our democracy. Moderator **Susan Sifuentes Trigueros**, BizFed PAC Chair and Senior Regional Public Affairs Manager for SoCal Gas, opened the panel with a closer look at the City of LA's new map for its 15 council districts. It was adopted this week by the LA City Council following months of public testimony and numerous drafts from the LA City Council Redistricting Commission.

Panelist **Frank Cárdenas**, the commission's executive director, detailed how the concerns of Councilmembers Paul Krekorian and Nithya Raman contributed to a "hard 15-6 split" among the commission, which spent a year crafting its district recommendations using U.S. Census data. Krekorian and Raman's districts were the most heavily impacted. One day after adoption of the new map, the two councilmembers introduced a motion to get the ball rolling on a November 2022 ballot measure establishing an independent redistricting commission. Regardless of who draws the lines, the process should be driven by the 14th Amendment principle of equal representation, Cárdenas reminded the audience.

Panelist **Robb Korinke**, principal of GrassrootsLabs and director of BizFed PAC, encouraged the business community to keep an eye on *new* districting in addition to redistricting. More than 150 cities across the state have moved from at-large election systems, where citywide voters elect all members of the council, to district elections that only permit voters within districts to elect their representative. This is largely spurred by the California Voting Rights Act, which makes it easier for minority groups to file suit over dilution of votes in at-large elections. BizFed PAC is heavily invested in what happens in council elections across LA County, even in small cities, because it often plays a role in determining representation on regional boards. This also positions the PAC to cultivate long-term relationships with elected officials, building to moments when they start ascending to positions of power at the state and federal levels. "They won't forget about us," Korinke said.

Panelist **Carolyn Williams**, co-chair of the LA County Citizens Redistricting Commission, used her platform and spotlight to humanize the 14 independent commissioners tasked (for the very first time) with drawing district boundaries for the county supervisors. The commission faces immense pressure, a tight budget, and staffing concerns, Williams said. The commissioners' small communications budget limits the reach of their public education efforts. How can YOU help? Share resources with your members. Local redistricting should be top-of-mind for all voters. LA County's five-member Board of Supervisors controls a \$36 billion budget for the nation's most populous county. The Citizens Redistricting Commission is set to choose a map from three final options by Dec. 15.



I'm so grateful for the sponsors, speakers, and attendees who made our 9th Annual Political Forecast possible. Our dynamic panels and presentations were only possible with the generous support of the following partners.



We're already talking about our next event. Onward!

Tracy Hernandez
BizFed Founding CEO