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### **My View: GOP must renew its conservative principles**

By Robert Fellmeth

Special to The Bee

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Early in the last century, a group in Los Angeles, influenced by their Republican Party's ideas, their faith, their desire for clean government, and by the thinking of Teddy Roosevelt and Bob La Follette, started the Lincoln-Roosevelt League.

Their mission: Take back the Republican Party from the Southern Pacific Railroad and its allies. They organized on a grass-roots level, first changing Los Angeles and its charter. In 1910, they took the state, electing Hiram Johnson as their governor.

They ended California's status as a backward banana republic and ushered in the greatest reform era the state has ever known. Almost exactly a century later, the future of the state will be determined by whether the Republican Party can once more change from within.

I have been a registered Republican for many decades. That allegiance carries with it a certain quintessentially American skepticism about government as the prime repository of progress. My party's stalwarts prefer self-regulating market solutions. If the prerequisites for such a market exist, let its consumer-driven democracy function.

And my party has insisted on private responsibility. We do not reflexively oppose all government; we are just from Missouri, the "show me" state. If government top-down regulation and cross-subsidies from others are imposed, justify them. But outside of these welcome parameters, our Republican legislators now function in a world of delusion. They have elevated anti-state and anti-tax rhetoric into a shibboleth of mindless obeisance.

Their responsibility to deal in reality is magnified by the antidemocratic budget structure that gives them power far beyond American principle. California is one of just three states that require a two-thirds vote for budgetary approval. Add to that a Republican caucus that commits all to a majority decision, and 17 percent of the Legislature (from gerrymandered districts concentrating the maximum number of conservative voters) can determine public spending, or disinvestment.

Currently, every Republican legislator defies our party's leader and succumbs to the majority of their minority, a fidelity to group-think inconsistent with real conservative values of individualism and conscience.

Another irony underlies the values-defining budget debate. The 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts saved California taxpayers (the relatively wealthy among us) an average of \$37 billion per year every year to at least 2011. The governor, to his credit, in late 2008 proposed \$13 billion in new revenue – more than have the Democrats. But legislative Republicans propose zero, except for a raid on funds committed to other purposes.

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The payment of current obligations to children requires revenues. How is the just-proposed Republican \$10 billion-plus cut in public education consistent with conservative commitment to future child investment? Given California's extraordinary relative wealth, how does the foreclosure on education required for jobs in the "flat world" comport with precepts of California competitiveness, or of patriotism?

For 2008, we enacted a late and dishonest budget. It is now exposed as \$40 billion or more short over the next 18 months. Basic state infrastructure work is now halted. We associate opposition to terrorism with patriotism. How high in our priority list is the betrayal of the opportunities our parents provided for us? Why is that not an act of patriotic failure?

The current political mantra of "no taxes" will change as more and more members of my party appreciate continued amnesia about the \$37 billion in annual federal tax savings – one-third of which could be expended at state and local levels to resolve our shortfall with reasonable spending cuts, consistent with true Republican principles of federalism.

An unanticipated political outrage is building quietly within our party to move toward primary challenges, more competitive redistricting and even electoral recalls.

California needs the Republican Party of Reagan and Wilson to resurge. When confronting a similar deficit in 1991, Gov. Wilson agreed to resolve the shortfall using 50 percent cuts and 50 percent new revenue. The Republican governor – finally – is similarly inclined. The extremism of the Republicans in the Legislature in defense of child disinvestment (against the state and public revenue) lacks perspective on the future and is devoid of the important empathy with our youth that we rightly require of our leaders.

Ironically, they now behave similarly to adolescents in their mutual reinforcement of common recalcitrance. As with teenagers, they are preoccupied with symbols and are subject to the overweening influence of their narrow peer group. Although legislative Republicans do not wear goth makeup or droop their pants close to their knees, they are in the same social vortex as the high school cliques we all remember.

For California to work again, we need the return of a principled, far-sighted and fact-consequences-based Republican Party.

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