

# Wandering & Wondering

John Maybury



## SAVE CALIFORNIA

“Proposition 13 was sold to the public 31 years ago as a way of protecting homeowners during a time of rising housing prices — and the corresponding rise in property taxes. This was and remains an imperative policy for California. However, the measure also exempted all commercial property from regular tax reassessment. Paradoxical to the law’s initial intent, the commercial property loopholes in Proposition 13 have actually shifted the tax burden away from corporations and onto the backs of residential property owners — Nobody in California benefits not small businesses, major corporations or workers when we fail to develop an educated work force, halt progress on important infrastructure projects, cut vital services and go more than \$24 billion in debt. As a reader wrote in response to an opinion piece I published recently: ‘My business benefits when I am able to hire decently educated employees who can spell, use good grammar, do math and solve new problems. I need maintained roads and police and fire

services as well, or my customers will go elsewhere.’ Just as damaging for the business community is the uncertainty of a tax system in which taxes and fees are raised based on what is politically possible, rather than a logical tax system based on what is economically productive. When you replace a steady source of commercial property tax with fees, and very high payroll taxes in some counties, you make business less competitive. Proposition 13 has institutionalized a system that puts new businesses at a competitive disadvantage when they end up paying much more in taxes than mature businesses. The fact is that Proposition 13 didn’t necessarily lower business taxes, it just made them more unpredictable. California now has some of the highest sales taxes and other regressive taxes because our property taxes have dropped into the lowest one-third of all states. Proposition 13 didn’t normalize our revenue stream or help our state invest in the future. Over the last few months, I have been talking to and organizing a campaign

with thousands of Californians including small-business owners, teachers, parents, students and employees of major corporations who are tired of seeing their schools and roads fall apart and who can no longer tolerate year after year of budget crisis in Sacramento. We now live in a state that is no longer making the adequate investments for the future success of our state. We know the problems too many of our K-12 schools are failing, we’re not sending enough young people to college, we’re letting our water, roads and rail infrastructure deteriorate, and we’re failing to adequately nurture the technology industries of the future. Our lack of fundamental capital investment is the cause of California’s lagging economic performance. Now let’s be honest about the solutions. Investments in physical and human capital require a steady, logical and consistent funding source. Such a steady funding source has disappeared from the California budget because of the illogical patchwork of California tax law. It is a broken system that will keep us on a fiscal roller coaster until we make the fundamental reforms necessary. One of the most important tax reforms we can make is to amend Proposition 13, the foundational tax law in California that, by restricting one of our most important funding streams, has contributed to so many of the problems fac-

ing our state. According to a recent statewide survey, 63 percent of Californians support ‘closing the loophole that allows corporations to avoid reassessment of the value of new property they purchase.’ Californians are fed up with the status quo and want to return our state as a beacon for education, innovation and progress. Reforming Proposition 13 to close corporate loopholes is not a panacea, but it is a vital step in the right direction.” (Phil Ting is the assessor-recorder of San Francisco. His op-ed piece appeared June 21 in the Sacramento Bee.)

## BLUE MARBLES

Join the Pacifica Beach Coalition in bringing attention to the plight of the ocean by sharing Blue Marbles with people committing random acts of kindness, such as picking up litter, composting, recycling, restoring native habitat, and conserving water and other natural resources. The Blue Marble is a famous photograph of the Earth taken by astronauts on December 7, 1972. It is likely the most widely distributed photographic image in existence, one of the few to show a fully illuminated Earth, because the astronauts had the Sun behind them when they took the image. To the astronauts, Earth had the appearance of a blue marble. When you get a Blue Marble, pass it along. (BlueMarbles.org)

## SOUL SAUCE

Soul Sauce with Jon Eriksen plays the first Sunday of each month at Nick’s restaurant lounge at Rockaway Beach from 2 - 5 p.m. (On July 5 only, the band will start early at 1 p.m.) This is an ongoing event. Get your Cal Tjader and Latin jazz fix while gathering seashells down by the seashore.

## SAMTRANS CUTS

SamTrans bus number 14 (Linda Mar Valley, Terra Nova High School), CX express to Colma BART, and DX express to downtown San Francisco are on the hit list of routes that could be cut back or even eliminated because of budget shortfalls. Congestion in Pacifica would increase significantly if these buses were cut or eliminated, especially on Highway 1. Community meetings are scheduled to discuss possible service changes: July 27, South San Francisco Municipal Services Building, 33 Arroyo Drive; July 28, SamTrans headquarters, 1250 San Carlos Avenue, San Carlos; July 29, Menlo Park City Council Chambers, 701 Laurel Street;

August 6, Half Moon Bay, location to be announced.

## RADIO LAB

Radio Lab, the inventive and addictive science series hosted by Robert Krulwich and Jad Abumrad, will be back with five new shows in September, and KALW 91.7 FM will broad-

cast them all Wednesdays at 1 p.m. starting September 9. But if you can’t wait until September, check out the RadioLab link at KALW.org, which hooks you up with weekly Radio Lab podcasts, including material you won’t hear on the radio.

## GREENER COWS

Canadian scientist Stephen Moore at the University of Alberta (Edmonton) is breeding cows that emit 25 percent less methane. Cows produce three-quarters of the world’s methane, a greenhouse gas 20 times worse than carbon dioxide for climate change. (Earthweek.com)

## SITSEER

- Why American Policy Sucks—Lobbyists Rule: Google it on PacificaRiptide.com
- Russian volcanic blast, sunspots, cosmic phenomena: SpaceWeather.com
- The latest suburban craze: BackyardChickens.com
- Support for volunteer services and nonprofits: One-Brick.org

## SWAMI SEZ

“Cats are smarter than dogs. You can’t get eight cats to pull a sled through the snow.” (Jeff Valdez)

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