

Republican Perspective

18 February 2015

by Ed Manning

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN - A GOOD PAYING BLUE COLLAR JOB

“Anyone that can walk to the welfare office, can walk to work.” Al Capp, Li'l Abner Cartoonist

The recent media reports have touted California job creation as evidence that we are finally on the road to recovery from the Great Recession. Good news as we all wish to see a vibrant economy. Living in the Bay Area we know that high-tech employment is leading the parade. Other sectors include financial services, biotechnology and medical care.

The International Business Times reports that 23.8% of California's population lives below the poverty line. That's in excess of 9 million people in a state that prides itself for progressiveness. Our poverty rate exceeds Duck Dynasty states of Louisiana and Mississippi!

With California's unemployment rate dropping to 7%, why are we leading the nation in poverty? A. Colin Cameron, professor of economics at UC Davis states that we have one of the largest immigrant populations and many are low-skilled with poor English.

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, the majority of high-tech employment is in computer and electronic product manufacturing (46% now vs 66% in 1992). High-tech employment represents only 4.3% of total CA employment. High-tech manufacturing employment requires a skilled, educated workforce.

California is faced not only with educating immigrants but also finding pathways to middle class jobs. But what are these jobs? Technology is rapidly reducing the number of blue-collar opportunities. With higher minimum wage requirements, look for more robots at your favorite fast-food haunt.

Manufacturing employment has historically been the path to higher paying jobs for the less educated. A Brookings Institute study showed, on average, manufacturing workers make 8.4% higher wages each week than those in all other industries combined. As manufacturing in California declines, less-skilled workers move down the pay scale into the service sector such as retail or hospitality.

California's progressive environmentalists are insuring that low skilled workers will not have traditional higher paying opportunities in manufacturing. Oh, they will have plenty of opportunity in "green" jobs they claim. The Ella Baker Center in Oakland trains low income individuals for green collar jobs. The training is for opportunities in "energy efficient building, construction and retrofits, renewable electric power, energy efficient vehicles, biofuels and manufacturing that produces sustainable products and uses sustainable processes and materials." indeed.com, a job search site, showed 48 sustainable manufacturing jobs in California and most were skilled positions. The cold truth is that green jobs are limited and will not provide for the numbers of low-skilled and less-educated to become upwardly mobile. Couple this with progressive objections to school choice and you have sown the seeds for generations to become dependent upon a political party and welfare from taxpayers.

Once upon a time, California hosted manufacturing plants for General Motors, Ford, Chrysler and NUMI Motors. All are gone and unlikely to return. Another job producer, the petrochemical industry is under attack and some wonder if the number of oil companies in the state will survive. Aerospace manufacturing has also declined and California is not even in the top 10 of states with aerospace job growth.

In the run-up to the 2016 Presidential election, we will hear ad nauseam about income inequality. Yet policies of progressives make it very difficult for low income workers to move up the economic food chain. Dan Walters of the Sacramento Bee, many years ago reported on the trend in California toward a bifurcated society. He recently added: "unfortunately, that has become its reality and while the state's media and political elites may sneer at Texas and other states that lack our mild weather and scenic attributes, they should note that Texas's poverty rate is just two-thirds of California's and Iowa's is just one-third. You can't eat an ocean view. Egalitarian and upwardly mobile pretensions, have the state evolving into haves and have nots."

Republicans are of the opinion that one role of state government is to create a business environment that attracts diverse industries. The state's draconian environmental regulations, high land, taxes and energy costs make manufacturing plant relocation unfavorable. According to Dorothy Rothrock, President of the California Manufacturers & Technology Association, "Unless you're forced to be in California for some reason, increasingly it's hard to find reasons that you have to be here."

So when a progressive talks about income inequality, ask them if they embrace automobile, steel, food processing, petrochemical, and conventional power plants? Perhaps they do but not in their coastal utopia. Another glass of chardonnay, please.