



Trump will lose America like Pete Wilson lost California

BY JOHN D. SKRENTNY, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 02/06/17 01:40 PM EST

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Republicans control the federal government, and the national Democratic Party is at an historic low. If President Trump can get his Supreme Court nominee through, the GOP domination will be complete. Yet despite the bleak mood among many Democrats and progressives, their future is bright. Just look to California.

The processes that brought about Democratic dominance in the Golden State are now being reproduced nationally.

Today, California is so blue, and so alienated from Republican America, that many Californians talk seriously about seceding from the union.

Conservatives decry California's liberal bent, and point out that if it wasn't for this alien blue state and its out-of-touch voters, Trump would have won the popular vote as well as the Electoral College.

But it wasn't always this way. California, of course, is the state where GOP demi-god Ronald Reagan made his name in politics. It was in California, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that Governor Reagan perfected his message of small government, low taxes, and shrinking the welfare state.

Yet California transitioned from red to deep blue, and this should be instructive for the national Democratic Party. We are seeing signs of the same processes that shifted California at work across the United States.

The real turning point for California was in the 1990s.

The first key process was demographic change, and the rapid growth of immigrant populations. California's overall population has long grown rapidly, but especially notable in the 1990s was the growth of the Latino share of the population. In the 1970s, Latinos made up only about an eighth of the overall total, and numbered 2.4 million. By the 1990s, the state's 7.5 million Latinos made up a quarter of the population.

We see a similar growth in the national Latino population today. Latinos were 5 percent of the total population in 1970s, but now constitute about 17 percent of the population. Asians make up another 5.6 percent. This growth will continue: The Pew Research Center [predicts](#) that by 2065, the Latino population will be 24 percent of the total, Asians will grow to 14 percent, and non-Latino whites will fall to 46 percent.

The other key process in California was the political reaction of the Republican Party to this growing diversity. In California in the 1990s, that reaction was spearheaded by Republican Governor Pete Wilson, who made immigration and overall reactions to diversity his signature issues.

In office from 1991 to 1999, Wilson prominently embraced Proposition 187 in 1994, which would have banned undocumented immigrants from using state services. It passed, but was later thrown out by the courts. Wilson also supported Proposition 209, which banned racial preference for disadvantaged minorities, and Proposition 227, which prohibited bilingual education. Both of these survived court challenges.

But the Republican Party of California did not survive the Wilson administration. Wilson and his supporters effectively branded the party in this state as anti-immigrant and hostile to diversity in general. Despite the election and re-election of Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 2000s, the trajectory of the Republican Party in the nation's most populous state has been a steady slide into irrelevance.

The state is currently governed by a Democratic supermajority in the legislature, a Democrat holds the governorship, both U.S. senators are Democrats, and 39 of California's 53 representatives in the House of Representatives are Democrats.

President Trump is, in effect, repeating Pete Wilson's playbook on the national stage. His boisterous and inflammatory language about immigrants, and his legally suspect executive orders, are portraying the national Republicans as anti-immigrant and anti-diversity.

Of course, this doesn't take much effort, as Republican politicians were already strongly trending in that direction. But Trump's extreme positions are similar to Wilson's in that they may not only cement the image of the entire party, but they can also motivate minorities and those sympathetic to diversity issues to come out and vote against Republicans across the country.

The national electoral map does not favor Democrats. The continuing GOP practice of voter suppression, and the rules of the Electoral College and the extra weight and power given to overwhelmingly white and Republican states, will dampen and slow the processes that occurred in California. Yet just a couple of weeks into the Trump administration, the parallels to the California story are striking.

Democrats should also be buoyed by the national protests. These protests have parallels in 1990s California as well, where protests evolved into citizenship drives and then voter mobilization efforts that led to the Democratic resurgence in California.

People protest when they have serious grievances and the emotions to motivate themselves to act. And memories last longer when there are emotions attached to them. The more we see protest, the longer these memories are likely to last and lead to registration efforts and then voting — in the 2018 midterms and beyond.

Americans who care about immigration and diversity will remember what the Republicans and Trump are now doing for a very long time — and if the California story is rewritten on the national stage, that will mean a long-term national domination by the Democratic party.

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The views of contributors are their own and not the views of The Hill.