

# California Review streamlining plan is all over the map

## LONG LISTS LIKE THIS BRING ON PARALYSIS

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Russell Hancock and R. Sean Randolph

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**T**he California Performance Review recently issued its report, a voluminous list of recommendations intended to streamline government and put California back on track. We commend Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger for his vision and for initiating the review.

But the report is incomplete. It doesn't set specific strategic goals. Nor does it provide a means to implement the suggested changes. Most importantly, it doesn't explain what would drive people to accomplish these reforms.

What we're left with is a phone-book-sized list of more than 1,200 random, unrefined ideas—ranging from allowing advertising on the state's home page on the Web to establishing a unified permitting authority to site power plants—and everything in between.

Experience has shown that lists like these produce paralysis, frustration and dissipation of energy. Small wonder, then, that our state's history of reform efforts is a graveyard of failures.

To stand a chance, change on the scale envisioned by the California Performance Review will require not only performance goals, but also a small number of clear priorities, and relentless follow-through from the top.

Presumably this is what will happen next. The governor will receive results from testimony about the review's report from several public hearings. Then he must choose whether to embrace some of the recommendations while discarding others. He may be tempted to praise all of it and turn it over to staff. This would be a mistake. Instead, we call on the governor to commit to a clear course of action, and see it through personally.

We have four suggestions:

- Be strategic. If this effort is to succeed, there must be an overarching strategy. Wholesale, structural change is what is needed, and to accomplish it there must be a tight, focused set of goals that address the root causes of our current fiscal crisis. Tactics—and we consider most of the recommendations in the report to be tactical recommendations—should serve larger strategic ends.

- Target productivity. Private sector productivity has grown 3 percent annually since 1995. Productivity in the public sector, by contrast, has stayed flat, registering just 0.4 percent annually between 1987 and 1994 (after 1994 the federal government stopped measuring it). Of course, the government shouldn't be held to private sector standards because government isn't a business, and it has a social and political stewardship to fulfill. But if California had achieved even half the productivity gains of private counterparts over the past decade, we might have saved enough to cover the deficit.
- Establish a clear means for implementation. Change on this scale will take years, and that means there must be sustained leadership from a body, such as an Office of Management and Budget, which is empowered to guide and manage the process. The governor and the Legislature should create it and then stand by it.
- Measure progress. Performance against the goals should be reported to the public at regular intervals, and state leaders should be on the hook for results. Each unit of the state apparatus should track its own performance and report to the public. They should gauge not only cost savings but progress in human resource issues and service-related benefits.

Californians' confidence in their government is at an all-time low. Restoring that confidence will require the state to perform its most important functions with more efficiency and accountability.

We have a rare opportunity to create meaningful reforms. But what is needed is a strategic, goal-driven approach supported by tireless champions in the statehouse.

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RUSSELL HANCOCK is president and CEO of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network. R. SEAN RANDOLPH is president and CEO of the Bay Area Economic Forum. They wrote this column for the Mercury News.