



In Case You Missed It:

NUMMI's Wake-Up Call For California

By Steve Poizner
The San Jose Mercury News
 July 30, 2009

I'm no fan of the saying "Better late than never" because, frankly, late just isn't good enough. Especially when it refers to stopping companies from leaving California. It is even more aggravating when the people who are "late" include politicians who have been responsible for serving Californians for over a decade.

Last week, U.S. Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein joined 15 members of California's congressional delegation to make a last-ditch plea to keep the New United Motor Manufacturing Inc. plant in Fremont open.

I fear that our senators are trying to close the garage door after the proverbial Prius has already driven out, taking many others along for the ride.

While I agree that our elected representatives should be doing everything they can to keep NUMMI from ending production in California, it raises the question: Where were these D.C. power players and Sacramento insiders when other auto manufacturers were leaving California?

The numbers are staggering. In 2008, 145 new car dealerships closed in California. The trend has continued in 2009, as an additional 59 closings took place in the first six months of the year. Statewide new car sales for the first quarter of this year were down 43 percent from a year earlier.

And why stop there? Where were these latecomers when the dozens of other manufacturers left our state?

California has lost 100,600 manufacturing jobs over the past year. More than 500,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector alone since December 2000. That is nearly a 28 percent decline over the past nine years.

We are in this current economic mess because the people whose job it is to keep jobs in California have been asleep at the wheel. They should have devoted themselves to bringing manufacturing and jobs back to California instead of making an 11th-hour push to keep one of the last auto manufacturing plants in the state from closing.

California's economy is broken. Our tax and regulatory regimes are driving companies like NUMMI out. Costs in the state are 24 percent higher than the national average and contribute to the job gap that leaves hardworking families without opportunities for upwardly mobile, high-paying careers.

We need to fix our business climate so that companies like NUMMI can stay and add jobs for Californians.

Having started several successful companies in California myself, I understand what it takes to keep and create jobs here. When I came to California 30 years ago, it was because this state was the best place to start a business.

Unfortunately, that is not the case today, but I will not give up on California and will fight to lower taxes and ease regulations to create jobs. A tax cut is the best way for us to reignite California's economy and to bring jobs back.

I propose a new mantra that every state official should ask themselves before making decisions: "Will this help add jobs in California or cause jobs to leave?"

That should be the most important test for every decision in this recession. It's not too late for us to bring jobs back to California, but it will take bold and decisive action. Something I commit to do when I am governor.

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