**HEARTLAND JOINS NEW CALIFORNIA COALITION**

By Deborah Nankivell, Mike Betts and Pete Weber

When Jim Wunderman, CEO of the Bay Area Business Council, and Tracy Hernandez, CEO of BizFed, first asked the Fresno Business Council, the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce, and others to join the New California Coalition (NCC), we approached the conversation with caution. We’ve known Jim and Tracy for a long time and have great respect for them, but we needed to have a crystal-clear understanding of how they saw NCC’s mission. We were keenly aware that inland Californians have sometimes fared poorly in coalitions with coastal organizations.

After many hours of conversation, including a marathon session in Monterey, we have enthusiastically agreed to join NCC as the Heartland Region, representing Fresno, Kings, Madera, and Tulare counties.

Not only did they persuade us that their mission was compelling, but they were willing to adapt it based on our input to ensure that all Californians, in every one of the thirteen regions of the State, will benefit from the success of the organization.

So, what is that mission? NCC is a non-partisan civic action movement based on shared responsibility for the prosperity and wellbeing of all California regions. While we recognize and celebrate the many good attributes of California, we will honestly identify the issues that have made the California Dream increasingly elusive for so many Californians, and we’ll develop policies and political strategies to tackle those issues.

Despite its extraordinary assets, California is on a downhill path. Our state was once appropriately dubbed the Golden State. Today we have the highest level of poverty in the nation, rank 49th in homeownership, have more than 50% of the nation’s unsheltered homeless population and 32% of the welfare recipients, rank dead last in literacy, and more people are leaving than entering California. When the 6th largest economy in the world doesn’t have reliable and affordable energy, or water, and can’t keep its forests from burning, it’s time to take notice, and *do something about it.* Tinkering at the margins is no longer acceptable.

Those of us from inland California are particularly eager to act because we feel the impacts most strongly and have for decades. Household incomes in some inland communities are only about 1/3 of those in the more affluent coastal communities. Because our big land areas cause us to drive longer distances and our warmer weather means we use more energy, our families and businesses bear the brunt of having the highest fuel and energy costs in the nation. And because we have a higher share of people of color, the social equity impacts are disturbingly deep.

We’re not casting blame. In a democracy, all interest groups have a right to advocate for their constituents, but California has a decades-long trend of policy developed by narrow interests with little regard for the public good. NCC will advocate for every-day, common-sense Californians. We’ll approach every issue as *civic stewards*. All our policy proposals will seek to achieve *triple-bottom-line outcomes*: inclusive economic growth, environmental sustainability and enhanced social equity.

During our discussions in Monterey, Tracy and Jim persuaded us that they cared about generating better outcomes for Californians in every region of the state. Indeed, they turned to Pete Weber and asked him to take responsibility for drafting the governance protocols for NCC. That gave rise to the notion that every one of the State’s regions would have a seat on the NCC board. Mike Betts will represent the Heartland Chapter. Deb Nankivell will serve as stewardship advisor for the statewide NCC.

Heartlanders, help is on the way! Please join us at <https://www.newcaliforniacoalition.org/>

*Deb Nankivell is CEO of the Fresno Business Council; Mike Betts is CEO of Betts Manufacturing Company and Chair of the Fresno Business Council; Pete Weber retired early from a successful business career to devote himself to civic work.*