



Gov. Gavin Newsom's message to business owners

BY JEFF VONKAENEL / jeffv@newsreview.com

Last Thursday—following in the tradition

of Earl Warren, Ronald Reagan, Pat Brown and other California governors over the last 94 years—Gov. Gavin Newsom spoke to several thousand businesspeople gathered at the annual host breakfast sponsored by the California Chamber of Commerce and the Sacramento Host Committee.

Although I missed the first 70 breakfasts, I have regularly attended for the last 25 years, and these breakfasts follow a somewhat predictable format.

This year, we heard Staff Sergeant Clinton L. Romesha, a Medal of Honor recipient, give an uplifting speech that put Chamber members' concerns about taxes in some perspective when he and other soldiers were being shot at by hundreds of Taliban. Then the national anthem was sung superbly by the Sacramento Gay Men's Chorus.

Grace Evans Cherashore, a San Diego business owner and the chamber's chairperson, made a full-throated defense of trade and our relationship with Mexico, while not mentioning the person whose name starts with "t" and ends with "p" and who has orange hair. Describing her hometown as originally an Indian village that grew over time with waves of immigrants and that now encompasses seven million people on both sides of the border, Evans pointed out that San Diego is the country's safest large city, dispelling the myth of mayhem and murder at the border.

And instead of focusing on getting government off the back of business, as so many Chamber leaders before her had done at the breakfast, she spoke of the responsibility of the business community to help solve our state's housing and poverty problems.

We live in a blue state, a very blue state. The major responsibility of the Republican Party is to put together a competitive softball team for the annual

legislators' game. Yet the Chamber crowd is a conservative one. The Chamber was a major funder of Meg Whitman in her race against Jerry Brown.

So while our Republican governors have an easy time speaking to their supporters at the Host Breakfast, it is not the same for the Democratic governors when they speak. Each governor handles it a different way. Grey Davis came into the room assuming that the Chamber members didn't like him, so he spoke using poll-tested words and phrases to make the case that he was good for business. Jerry Brown played the role of philosopher-king as only he could, giving a rambling but deeply insightful speech that often included quotes from ancient scripts.

So I didn't know what to expect from Newsom. Recalling his entrepreneurial background, he made a convincing case that he understood first-hand the trials and tribulations of running a business in California. But he pointed out that California's impressive growth means that somehow, despite everything, we are still the best state to do business in. Despite the negative press, California businesses receive more than half of the country's total venture capital, our employment numbers are superb and we are paying off our state's debts and putting money in reserve.

And he brought it home, saying that having 133,000 people living on the streets is a national disgrace. We need to solve the affordable housing problem, and the people in the room should put more of a focus on reducing poverty than on our balance sheets.

I left the breakfast feeling hopeful. □

Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review.

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