

Opinion: Trump is America's problem, not California's

By Joe Mathews

Sorry, America, but we Californians are not going to stop Donald Trump for you.

To believe otherwise is to misunderstand California.



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I can see how you got your hopes up. Polls show at least three out of every four of us don't like him. California Republican strategists have launched a campaign to deny him a victory in June's presidential primary, and thus prevent him from getting the delegates he needs to secure the Republican nomination. And many California voices want to go further. An immigrant group declared him "persona non grata" in the state; cities have discussed denying him permits for rallies, given his propensity to incite crowds.

He deserves every bit of our scorn. Trump stands against almost everything that our state now represents. Our culture and economy are built on diversity and integration; he divides and race-baits. Mexico is our top export market; he slanders Mexicans and wants to build a wall across a border. We're devoted to science; he spews discredited nonsense about vaccines. Our industries—technology, entertainment, logistics—are built around trade; he wants to start a trade

war.

So why aren't we up in arms? Because Californians simply have no time to be up in arms about anything. And that's especially true when the subject is American politics, which takes place in a country, if not a planet, different than our own. It's also pretty rich of Americans—who hold the most important presidential contests in states smaller than some California counties and limit us to just U.S. two senators—to expect Californians to save them from their own democratic decisions.

In other words: Trump is your problem, America, not ours.

This attitude was perfectly expressed in a joke Gov. Jerry Brown told recently: "If Trump were ever elected, we'd have to build a wall around California to defend ourselves from the rest of this country."

Fortunately, President Trump is still a long shot. And Californians are loath to waste any of the precious time we don't spend in traffic. More than 70 percent of us can't do anything to stop Trump in this election; the only people who can vote in the GOP primary here are a dying subspecies of *homo Californiens* called Republicans. And, no matter how those Californians vote in June, will Trump really go away? Isn't he one of those chronic conditions—like diabetes—that we just have to manage?

In other contexts, like public health, California does know how to stop things—and even ban them. And we love to pick on small targets. We'll ban foie gras or shark fin soup in the blink of an eye.

But Trump is too unwieldy to fit our infrastructure of prohibition. I suppose that could change. Maybe he'll set himself on fire, and we could throw our anti-smoking laws at him. If he takes a swim in one of our rivers, state biologists could go after him as an invasive species. But even though his campaign rhetoric is a threat to our civic environment, the

California Environmental Quality Act—a favorite California tool for delaying new projects of any kind—can't be used to stall his campaign past the primary date.

The idea of stopping Trump also bumps up against one strong California cultural tendency: tolerance for bad celebrity behavior and over-the-top hucksterism. He'll sell crummy casinos and bogus "university" classes just as Hollywood sells formulaic sequels as must-see events. Our sales excesses compromise us when we get moralistic. I'd love to see Santa Barbara's Katy Perry or Long Beach's Snoop Dogg issue an anti-Trump anthem, but how exactly would stars like those call him out on his outrageous antics?

If we were serious about stopping Trump, we'd have already rallied Silicon Valley to the cause. These days, most difficult California problems—from taxation to cancer immunotherapy—are addressed by asking Sean Parker, the former Facebook president, to figure something out. And if Twitter's rules against "behavior that harasses intimidates or uses fear to silence another user's voice" were seriously enforced, Trump's account would have been suspended long ago.

Heck, if our fervently anti-Trump Legislature really wanted to make life difficult, it could pass a law declaring that California businesses don't have to serve hate mongers and their campaigns. Such a move would offer a rejoinder to laws in other states that permit discrimination against gays. Call it a reverse North Carolina.

But California isn't serious about stopping Trump. That may be just as well. He would use such opposition to portray himself as a victim. Which is why, as California enters the spotlight of the presidential campaign, the best strategy may be to stay true to ourselves, and to ignore Trump as best we can.

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