Twitter Thread by Ezra Klein

Ezra Klein
@ezraklein

So I'd recommend reading this thread from Dave, but I thought about some of these policies, and how they fit into the whole, a lot, and want to offer a different interpretation.

> It's very in vogue to bash California and this doesn't even reach to some things that deserve scorn, like the continuing control of the Western States Petroleum Association and the state Chamber of Commerce in policymaking. And yet-https://t.co/vHZ6GM7QF8
>
> — David Dayen (@ddayen) February 11, 2021

I think California is world leading on progressivism that doesn't ask anyone to give anything up, or accept any major change, right now.

That's what I mean by symbolically progressive, operationally conservative.

Take the 100% renewable energy standard. As @leahstokes has written, these policies often fail in practice. I note our leadership on renewable energy in the piece, but the kind of politics we see on housing and transportation are going foil that if they don't change.

Creating a statewide consumer financial protection agency is great! But again, you're not asking most voters to give anything up or accept any actual changes.

I don't see that as balancing the scales on, say, high-speed rail.

CA is willing to vote for higher taxes, new agencies, etc. It was impressive when LA passed Measure H, a new sales tax to fund homeless shelters. And depressing to watch those same communities pour into the streets to protest shelters being placed near them. That's the rub.

For progressivism to succeed, it needs to address the basics of people's lives. It doesn't get more basic than housing, transportation, schools.

If we can't fix those, I can't say I'm optimistic on climate change, or progressives continuing to hold power.

I tried to show this in the piece, but maybe I should've said it more explicitly. I don't think the fault here mainly lies with political leadership.

Gavin Newsom, Eric Garcetti, London Breed — they have hard jobs, and while I have my critiques, I think they're largely pushing the right things. But they keep getting forced back by local backlash and fractured governance systems. And those systems were fractured by design.

Look how hard SF's political leadership has been fighting to reopen schools! If Breed could do it, it would be done. But it's not just that Breed can't open the schools, she can't even stop them from doing a politically toxic renaming exercise while the schools are still closed.

The point of this piece isn't There Oughta Be A Law. It's that even in a very blue state, the aesthetic of progressivism often runs way ahead of the willingness to allow the change needed to achieve progressive priorities and ideals.

For the reasons Dave points out, I want California to be a model for governance nationwide, and worldwide. We're doing some genuinely great things.

But until we get the basics right, people aren't going to listen to us on the longer-term stuff.

And this isn't just about the politicians. It's us, the voters, the people who live here, the people who think of ourselves as progressive. The politicians can only do so much. There needs to be a higher bar to believe you're fighting the good fight than a yard sign.

It's a trope of conservative politicians in other states that "they don't want to become California." I want that to be laughable. I want everyone to want to become California.