

## People's Republic of Taxifornia?

By Andrea Seastrand

It sounds crazy, but Californians could wake up a few years from now to find themselves no longer living in the United States, but instead in the People's Republic of Taxifornia. Or perhaps our left coast worker's paradise will be called the Union of Soviet Socialist Counties or North Cuba.

A group called [Yes California](#) is collecting signatures to place a proposition on the November 2018 ballot that would delete the portions of the California Constitution that declare California to be "an inseparable part of the United States of America" and that acknowledge the U.S. Constitution to be the "supreme law of the land."

If it passes, a ballot measure in March 2019 would ask, "Should California become a free, sovereign, and independent country?" In order to pass, that measure would need at least 50 percent of registered voters to cast ballots and at least 55 percent of them to vote "yes."

If it's approved, the governor would be required to submit an application to the United Nations for California to be recognized as a member country. Secession would also require a constitutional amendment approved by two-thirds of Congress and three quarters of the state legislatures.

All of this sounds quite far-fetched, beginning with the difficulty in Yes California collecting at least 585,407 valid signatures by July 25, 2017. But crazier things have happened, including a state secession movement that led to the Civil War, which cost 620,000 men their lives.

Perhaps the best argument for secession is that the federal government has royally screwed up this country, particularly when it comes to debt. There are a lot of scary things on the Internet, but one of the more frightening is [U.S.DebtClock.org](#). Make sure you're sitting down before you click on it and see the dizzying array of debt and spending numbers whizzing upward.

The biggest number is total U.S. debt, which is nearing \$20 trillion – that's \$20,000,000,000,000. That number is so large it's difficult to fathom. A more graspable, but no less worrying, number is the amount owed by each man, woman and child in the country: more than \$61,000.

California likely would have to pay off its share of the U.S. debt before it

would be allowed to secede. Are you prepared to shell out \$61,000 for yourself and every member of your family? Perhaps you'd prefer that state government covered the cost, which is about \$2.5 trillion based on the state's percentage of the U.S. population. But it would take the entire \$122.5 billion General Fund the next 20 years to pay it off.

Neither of those options is very attractive. So we're likely to be stuck with the national debt burden for generations to come – assuming the U.S. government doesn't default on its debt and plunge the world into financial chaos.

But assuming the state's share of the debt somehow could be worked out, California as its own country would still be stuck with a significant debt burden. The [California debt clock](#) exceeds \$455 billion, with a debt burden per resident in excess of \$11,594. While that's bad enough, it may understate the problem.

“California's state and local governments face serious financial challenges, including \$1.3 trillion in debt and underfunded pensions, plus neglected infrastructure,” said Ed Ring, author of a recent study for the California Policy Center titled, [“What is the Average Pension for a Retired Government Worker in California?”](#)

His study found that the average pension in 2015 for a retired public employee in California with 30 years on the job is \$68,673. That's 26 percent more than private-sector workers earn while still working. More than 50,000 California public sector employees, including 71 San Luis Obispo County Pension Trust retirees receive in excess \$100,000 in annual pension benefits.

So even if California can escape the United States and all of its problems, it will still be stuck with significant problems of its own. Fortunately, unlike Hotel California, where the guests can check out any time they like but never leave, we have the ability to exit California if things get too bad. Which gives #Calexit a whole new meaning.

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