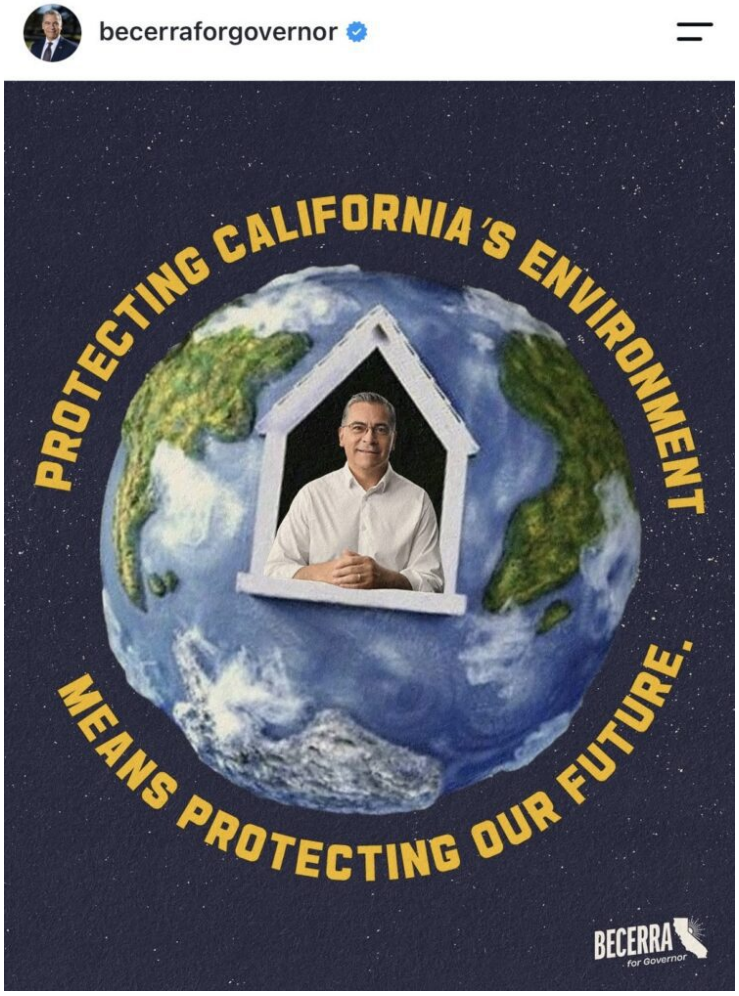
The Governor’s Mansion State Historic Park in Sacramento
(Public Domain)

Those of you who tuned in to the extra-long season finale of my favorite reality TV show, the California State Legislature, on September 1 (a full half-day after session was supposed to end, mind you: Drama!) may have, as I did, audibly gasped at the moment when the Assembly simply declined to vote on a compromise wildfire bill proposal (after a deal had reportedly been struck in the wee hours of the weekend: Drama!). The last-minute maneuver punted a critical conversation about wildfire risk mitigation, utility bills, and insurance rates and availability—one that’s been brewing for years and became an even more concentrated focus during the past legislative session with the release of the California Earthquake Authority’s SB 254 report.

Also waiting in the Legislature’s wings: a reckoning on implementation of California’s landmark single-use plastic extended producer responsibility framework, SB 54. An effort by regulated industry to pause the law’s implementation fell short at the end of session, but conversations remain ongoing, and stakeholders are pushing for a reform package to be introduced at the start of the next session in January. Key questions about the state’s waste management system, the role of single-use bioplastics in California’s economy, and the degree to which producers will be required to grapple with the ever-growing deluge of single-use waste that overwhelms our landfills and waterways are on the table.

And these are just a couple of the major storms brewing (pun intended?). There’s the future of Cap-and-Invest, the continued transition to electric vehicles while fossil fuel price shocks driven by geopolitical instability persist, the specter of a powerful El Niño that threatens to overwhelm state infrastructure…

But looming large over all of these conversations is one big unknown about the next season of my favorite show: Where will California’s next Governor stand? If the polls are any indication, former HHS Secretary and California Attorney General Xavier Becerra is most likely to find himself in the role—but his positions remain opaque. It’s perhaps slightly easier to divine the position Republican candidate Steve Hilton might take on at least some of these issues. No matter who is in the Governor’s Mansion come January, one thing is for sure. The next Governor will need to hit the ground running on some of the most controversial and consequential environmental issues of our time.



A post shared on social media by the Becerra campaign this week.

What is equally true is that across all of these issues, there exists an ecosystem of deeply knowledgeable stakeholders and advocates whose expertise is waiting to be tapped. It’s time for the gubernatorial candidates to start plugging in. I’ll show my cards and say that I hope the polling proves right, and that if it does, I also hope Mr. Becerra is starting to think carefully about who will advise him on these critical topics.

Both candidates have talked a lot about affordability in California. Meanwhile, climate change has been far from a signature issue for either candidate and is increasingly painted as an antithetical focus to those affordability concerns that are driving today’s state and national politics. But the reality is that the next decade of climate change impacts will cost our state deeply in both a human and an economic

sense. California simply cannot live up to its image—as a center for innovation and creativity; as a welcoming home to dreamers; as place of storied natural beauty, environmental diversity, and perfect weather—unless we navigate climate change thoughtfully. Or more simply put: We can’t have an affordable California without smart climate policy.

The next Governor needs to be prepared to approach these battles with an understanding of the true costs of climate change and the ways those costs are driving the affordability pressures that plague constituents *right now*. I hope the candidates are studying up.