

Dan Walters: Neel Kashkari represents a new image for California GOP

<http://www.sacbee.com/2014/03/06/6216019/dan-walters-neel-kashkari-represents.html>

By [Dan Walters](#)
dwalters@sacbee.com

Published: Thursday, Mar. 6, 2014 - 10:04 pm

Last Modified: Thursday, Mar. 6, 2014 - 10:19 pm

Neel Kashkari is young, smart, accomplished, articulate and relatively moderate, and embodies California's incredible cultural diversity.

He is, in other words, exactly the sort of candidate that the [California Republican Party](#) must offer voters if it is ever to become relevant again. And it's too bad, therefore, that he's wasting his energy on a campaign for governor he cannot win.

Take it to the bank: Barring an untimely death or some calamity of his own making, Democrat Jerry Brown is certain to win re-election to a record fourth term as governor this year – more than likely in a landslide.

It's not that Brown lacks shortcomings and Kashkari has singled out the most obvious – the governor's stubborn insistence on beginning construction of a north-south bullet train that lacks any semblance of financial viability.

Kashkari calls it a “crazy train” and that's not an inappropriate sobriquet, but despite the project's growing unpopularity, it's not enough to derail Brown's bid. The governor has forged an image that plays well – tight with the public's buck and liberal on social issues.

But back to Kashkari and his role in the GOP's hopes of regaining the status it once enjoyed in California, before its economy and culture underwent a dramatic evolution beginning just about the time of Brown's first governorship four decades ago.

With its [voter registration](#) now below 30 percent, the growing ranks of independents tending to vote Democratic, and holding no statewide offices and small shares of legislative and congressional seats, the [Republican Party](#) needs a major image makeover.

Candidates such as Kashkari, secretary of state hopeful Pete Peterson and Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin, who just announced for state controller, represent a new, quasi-libertarian image.

“I'm not the party of no,” Kashkari told the Sacramento Press Club on Thursday, adding, that his party “needs to be the party of economic ideas” and public [education reform](#) to fight poverty and rising income inequality.

None of the three, it must be said, is anything close to being a favorite to win this year, but by offering themselves, they indicate a willingness to take back their party from the single-issue zealots and offer California – especially its independent voters – alternatives to the dominant Democrats.

Politics dominated by one party – any party – ill-serve Californians because they disenfranchise large segments of the population and give the one party's narrow interest groups free rein.

Kashkari, with his background in finance, would have been a good candidate for controller or state treasurer, articulating how such knotty issues as unfunded liabilities for pensions and retiree health care and other massive debts could be resolved. And he would have had a much better chance of winning one of those steppingstone offices than the governorship.

Call The Bee's Dan Walters, (916) 321-1195. Back columns, www.sacbee.com/walters. Follow him on Twitter @WaltersBee.