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Your Turn: Crisis requires us to rise above self-interests

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Article Text:

California is in the midst of its most serious fiscal and governance crisis in our lifetime. Solving this problem will require re-engineering the service priorities, structure and financing of state and local government.

Gov. Jerry Brown has been refreshingly honest with the public about the serious nature of our crisis. He's put everything on the table and is questioning the effectiveness of existing programs, eliminating those that are not achieving the intended results.

Brown's recommendation to repeal enterprise zone tax incentives makes sense. A recent Public Policy Institute of California study found that this \$500 million dollar program has been ineffective in creating jobs or businesses.

The proposal to eliminate redevelopment agencies merits serious discussion. At a minimum, redevelopment needs to be significantly reformed. Redevelopment agencies have diverted badly needed revenues from vital public safety, education and health programs.

Brown's budget proposes to "realign" government services by returning to counties the authority and responsibility to operate certain programs currently administered by the state. Done properly, realignment has the potential to increase local government's ability to more effectively and efficiently operate important public safety, mental health and child welfare programs.

We should incentivize cities, counties and schools to work more closely together to improve children's outcomes. A non-partisan government reform organization proposed an initiative last year that would reward this type of collaboration by lowering the two-thirds threshold for new taxes only if a county, city and school district jointly developed a comprehensive community plan.

We also need to achieve cost savings through reasonable and fair compensation and benefits that respect the work of public employees without unduly burdening local budgets and taxpayers.

If we want to have a sustainable public infrastructure that keeps our communities safe, educates our children and cares for our most vulnerable, we need to regain the ability to rise above our own specific interests and do what's

best in the interest of all Californians.

John Gioia is a member of the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors.

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