
Foreword

Eight years ago we created CPI out of a frustration that progressives had no coherent voice to counter conservatives who had controlled San Diego media and politics for decades. At every turn, their small government, low-tax, unfettered free market agenda (“business-friendly climate” in local terminology) dominated local government, policy debates and media opinion. We didn't have an adequate set of capacities and institutions to promote progressive responses — and a progressive vision — to break this ideological “lock box.”

Since that time, driven by a reinvigorated labor movement and new progressive capacities, San Diego has seen the development of a more effective local progressive infrastructure with all cylinders firing — research, policy, organizing, new coalitions, electoral capacity and aggressive communications. Consequently, the city once known as the heart of the John Birch Society's political base has step by step become more “blue” in today's political typology — electing new progressive leaders, passing affordable housing and living wage laws and creating new institutions that have considerable influence and presence.

That's the good news. But, watching San Diego turn towards “blue” like most of urban America, local and national right wing party strategists and think tanks launched an aggressive response. They were committed to keeping San Diego a “red city.”

With stunning speed and impressive coordination, local, state and national party structures and think tanks invested heavily and quickly were able to dominate local media and policy debates.

We learned quickly that to be successful in this new local political environment we needed to be nimble, respond at every turn and find ways to get back on the offense. And we once again confirmed our belief that competing with the right in the battle of ideas, message, policy and governance requires local capacity to engage in metropolitan regions.

It's clear that the right wing assault on America is moving to the cities. The right can be stopped with ideas, strategy and organization. But this challenge will require new levels of clarity, capacity, sophistication and coordination among regional, statewide and national institutions — including an array of think tanks, regional policy/action centers, and well organized base level labor, faith-based and community constituencies.

Target San Diego was published to offer a preview of what the right hopes is their next period of expansion into America's major metropolitan areas. We prepared this report to begin a discussion about this emerging political dynamic in cities across America and so that, ultimately, we can be better prepared with strategic capacity to fight for our vision and agenda. Lee Cokorinos has translated his experience and insight on how the right, brick by brick, built their national movement into the metro setting. He paints a useful and detailed picture of the structures, leading figures and day-to-day functioning of the right wing infrastructure. I know this report will be a valuable resource for progressives committed to building a movement for justice.

Donald Cohen
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