



## **Move Workers Out of Board of Equalization Building Before Someone Gets Hurt**

By George Runner

Sacramento residents who recently witnessed the successful Fix50 project must wonder why government can't also find a way to deal with other problems in an equally swift and efficient manner. Take, for instance, the troubled government building at 450 N St. in downtown Sacramento, just blocks away from the future Kings arena.

Falling windows, leaking sewage pipes, mold and methane gas are but a few of many safety problems plaguing the state Board of Equalization headquarters in recent years. The Sacramento Bee's Jon Ortiz has done an excellent job of chronicling the ongoing saga in his State Worker column.

Recently we've learned that the building's fire safety system has also failed, forcing an hourly fire safety walk until repairs are made. Additionally, employees have filed a \$50 million claim with the state alleging health problems stemming from the mold contamination. More glass could fall at any time, so the 24-story building remains surrounded by scaffolding. A 2012 incident, captured on security videotape, shows a pedestrian mere feet away from being struck by a glass panel that fell from the ninth floor.

The great hypocrisy of this entire situation is that if this building were owned by a private company, the city of Sacramento would intervene and shut it down until safety standards were met. But given that it's a state building, the city lacks jurisdiction.

It shouldn't take a tragedy to get government to do the right thing. We need to deal with this problem now, rather than continue to patch it with costly, taxpayer-funded Band-Aids.

After spending nearly \$60 million on repairs to a building with an original purchase price of nearly \$90 million, the state now faces a price tag of more than \$100 million for repairs and related costs for temporarily relocating workers.

This is not a new issue. The building was constructed by the California Public Employees' Retirement System in 1991 and initially leased by the state. The state's Department of General

Services took responsibility for maintenance and repairs in 1999, during Gov. Gray Davis' administration.

Just a year later, DGS reached a settlement with the contractor and architect. Unfortunately, the state failed to identify the most significant problems with the building, letting the contractor and architect off the hook for the major problems yet to be uncovered.

The simple truth is that it's impossible to expeditiously and cost-effectively fix the building while it is occupied. This failed approach is wasting tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

In 2010, when I was a state senator, I co-wrote legislation to move state workers out of the building. The legislation would have saved those taxpayer dollars now being wasted on endless repairs; unfortunately then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed my bill, citing the state's difficult fiscal condition.

A state audit is in progress to review the history of the troubled building and evaluate alternatives for the future. The report, due in the fall, will hopefully serve as a kick in the pants for Gov. Jerry Brown and his administration.

Furthermore, I'm pleased to stand together with Assemblyman Roger Dickinson, my fellow Board of Equalization members, state workers and concerned citizens in supporting a new bipartisan legislative effort to move the board to a new location. When Assembly Bill 1656 reaches the governor, he should do the right thing and sign it.