



‘Leaving California: The Untold Story’ Explores Reasons Behind Mass Exodus From State

Description

USA: More than 700,000 people left California from April 2020 to July 2022 to relocate to other U.S. states, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

The fact that hundreds of thousands left “in light of California being such a wonderful place is ... unbelievable!” a researcher says in EpochTV’s new documentary “Leaving California: The Untold Story,” which premiered on April 21.

“People are leaving [California] to go to places that once were known as ‘hell-hot Texas’ or ‘desert Nevada’ that have become paradises in their mind—and we took paradise and turned it into hell,” another researcher says in the film.

The remarks by Victor Davis Hanson, a historian at the Hoover Institute, and Jim Doti, president emeritus and professor of economics at Chapman University, encapsulate the biggest, unprecedented question facing Californians: Why are people leaving this paradise?

In the 70-minute film, Siyamak Khorrami—the host of EpochTV’s “California Insider” program and editor of The Epoch Times Southern California edition—takes viewers on a personal journey to discover why people are fleeing the Golden State, once a prime magnet destination for immigrants and tourists from within the United States and around the world.

Called “the most important documentary on California,” the film looks at challenges faced by those who call—or called—California home, and their experiences grappling with various pressing issues that include crime, education, housing, cost of living, wildfires, and homelessness.

Crime

Property crime is one of many reasons some have moved out.

Derek Drake, whose family-owned laundromat in Oakland had been subject to multiple window-

smashing break-ins in recent years, is one of the 700,000. In one incident, thieves stole \$600 from the ATM while causing \$32,000 in damage, he said.

He attributes the spike in crime to state policies that have reduced penalties for certain crimes in recent years.

“They know they’re not going to get in trouble. The penalties out here are nothing. It’s all ‘non-violent crime.’ A lot of people aren’t even reporting crimes anymore,” he said.

High Cost of Living

“A lunch is \$30 now,” Kevin Schmidt, an actor, says in the documentary.

Everything has become more expensive in Los Angeles, from gas prices reaching \$7 per gallon to more than \$2,700 for a one-bedroom apartment, the former California resident said.

Government policies have an effect on the high cost of living, according to Hanson, the Hoover Institute historian.

“The people who set policy—whether it’s on electric prices or fuel prices—they’re never subject to the consequences of their own ideology,” as the policymakers can afford the rates, he said.

Many big employers—such as Uber and Tesla—already relocated their headquarters to states with lower taxes and less stringent labor laws, while small businesses are pushed out by minor infractions that can lead to hefty settlements.

Diana Bonnett, a business owner who also left California, said she mistakenly underpaid an employee about \$34. Without first notifying her of the underpayment, the employee filed a lawsuit, which was settled for \$30,000, she said.

With employers moving out of California, where the income tax rate can reach 13.3 percent, individuals are seeking better opportunities in Florida, Washington, and Texas, where there’s no income tax.

Education

Many are also fleeing for their children’s education.

Only one-third of fourth graders in California were proficient in math in 2022, according to the Public Policy Institute of California.

Gloria Romero, former Democratic majority leader for the California state Senate, points out in the documentary a correlation between failing academic performance and incarceration—saying almost 70 percent of state’s inmates don’t have a high school diploma.

“If we don’t transform failing schools, in which disproportionately high poverty, African American, Latino kids are trapped ... you’re going to find illicit activity, drug running, [and] crime,” she said.

Environmental Regulations

While the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) was intended to minimize negative effects on the environment and wildlife, it has become a common tool for anyone to sue a development proposal over arbitrary disagreements. That can prolong the approval process for years, making a project costly and no longer viable, developer and former Costa Mesa Mayor Jim Righeimer says.

“In other states, if you want to sue, you [need] some standing,” he says in the film. “Here, anybody can sue to stop a development from going forward.”

As such, many well-intentioned laws have led to developers stopping operations or leaving California, where politicians are calling for building more affordable housing to address homelessness.

Homelessness

Pleasant weather is the state’s biggest blessing—and woe—as it has nurtured a vibrant culture of outdoor living and, when coupled with other problems, street homelessness.

About 30 percent of the nation’s homeless—more than 170,000 people, and growing—reside in California, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s 2022 count ([pdf](#)).

The problem has become an industry, with the state feeding billions into it without seeing any improvement, former Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva said.

“There are people making their careers feeding off of the homeless,” he says in the documentary. “You look at the nonprofits ... [their] CEOs are making \$800,000 a year. Managers and directors are pulling in \$200,000-plus.”

Villanueva said politicians are claiming the homeless crisis is the result of a lack of affordable housing, when it’s really a drug and mental health issue.

“If you’re smoking meth 24/7, rent could be a nickel a month and you couldn’t afford it,” he said.

Is There a Future?

Against the backdrop of the mass exodus, Khorrami sees hope in grassroots efforts by people such as Zach Southall—the founder of homeless outreach Charity on Wheels, who helps homeless individuals in his community get their lives back to normal.

“The majority of the people that I work with—the homeless—they’re dealing with some sort of trauma, heartbreak,” Southall said. “It’s a heart issue.”

His team focuses on getting to the root causes of homelessness by listening to each person's story and building trust, through consistent outreach on the ground. That's "so tough" and "requires investment in people that government is not ready to make," he said.

"We are having real conversations that are leading to real relationships being developed, and people will actually tell you what's going on [in their lives] ... And next week, they'll see you again ... again ... and again. Eventually ... when they are ready for a change, guess whom they are going to call? ... You!" he said.

Through the journey of investigating the exodus, Khorrami realized that the breaking point might be a turning point for California.

"There are so many other people doing the same [like Southall], but their stories are not told," he said. "The future of California is in the hands of these people. If I can help share their stories, maybe it will inspire more Californians to do the same."

To watch "Leaving California: The Untold Story," visit [EpochTV](#) or [LeavingCAmovie.com](#).

by Jack Bradley

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