

Jerry Brown joins anti-Trump ‘resistance’ in unusual State of the State speech

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Observations on California and its politics

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It was arguably the most unusual State of the State address ever delivered by a California governor.

Jerry Brown devoted almost all of Tuesday’s speech to the Legislature to excoriating President Donald Trump – without mentioning him by name – and calling “for courage and for perseverance” because “the future is uncertain and dangers abound.”

It could mean that Brown, who has been fairly constrained, vis-à-vis other California politicians, on Trump becoming president, now wants to claim a national role in the anti-Trump “resistance” movement that’s emerged, most noticeably in last weekend’s massive women’s rights demonstrations.

“While no one knows what the new leaders will actually do,” Brown said as he launched his verbal assault, “there are signs that are disturbing. We have seen the bald assertions of ‘alternative facts.’ We have heard the blatant attacks on science. Familiar signposts of our democracy – truth, civility, working together – have been obscured or swept aside.”

He recited a now-familiar list of California’s conflicts with the new federal regime, including immigration, Obamacare and climate change, but added, “we can all work together” on infrastructure improvements, “even a dam that the president can help us with.”

That appeared to be an indirect gubernatorial endorsement of the long-proposed Sites reservoir on the west side of the Sacramento Valley, very near the retirement home Brown wants to build on ancestral land.

But will Brown really retire when his second governorship ends two years hence?

Tuesday’s address will certainly rekindle speculation that the 78-year-old governor might not yet be ready to leave the stage after a half-century-long political career and that he might still yearn for a U.S. Senate seat 34 years after voters short-circuited his ambition to segue from his first governorship into the Senate.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein is up for re-election next year, but she's 83 years old, recently had a pacemaker implanted and has not definitely declared for re-election despite hinting that she's leaning toward seeking another term.

Former Assembly Speaker and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown has been publicly speculating that Feinstein will give up her seat next year and anoint Brown as her successor.

Were Trump to continue his polarizing ways – which is a near-certainty – a seat in the Senate, representing a very blue, very large state, would be a high-profile platform for Brown who, as Tuesday's speech demonstrated once again, has an unmatched talent for high-concept political verbiage.

And what then? Would a fourth Brown run for the presidency in 2020 be off the table? He'd be 82 then, but he's in excellent health. Judging by Tuesday's speech, the Trump presidency has given him an injection of adrenaline.

This is all speculation, of course, and Feinstein could end it immediately by firmly declaring that she'll seek another Senate term. But until she does, Brown's potential post-gubernatorial career is fair game and even a very remote possibility of a Brown vs. Trump duel is political catnip.

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