



WHITE PAPER TWO

The Case for California Sovereignty

The argument across six areas: the scale of the society, its representation in Washington, its fiscal capacity, earned federal benefits, the constitutional position, and what Californians say.

Contents

01	Summary	3
02	Scale	4
03	Representation	5
04	Fiscal capacity	6
05	Earned benefits	7
06	The legal position	8
07	Public opinion	9
08	The ask	10
09	References	11

California is a society of 39.4 million people producing \$4.3 trillion a year. This paper sets out what follows from that across six areas: the scale itself, representation in Washington, fiscal capacity, earned federal benefits, the constitutional position, and what Californians say.

SECTION 1

Summary

California is a society of 39.4 million people producing \$4.3 trillion a year, running its own universities, courts, water system and electrical grid. In the federal Senate it holds the same two seats as Wyoming, which has 588,753 residents. In eight of the nine years from 2015 to 2023 it sent Washington more than it received, by \$101 billion in 2022 alone.

Those three facts are not in serious dispute. What follows from them is disputed, and that is the argument this paper makes: that a society of this size, contributing on this scale, with representation weighted this way, has grounds to examine whether the present arrangement serves it, and that the examination should be conducted officially rather than argued from assertion.

This paper does not claim that independence would be easy, cheap or quick. It claims that the question is serious enough to be answered properly, and that nobody has yet answered it with the authority required.

SECTION 2

Scale

California produced **\$4.3 trillion** in output in 2025, roughly 14 percent of the entire American economy, generated by about 11.5 percent of its population. The next two state economies are Texas at about 9 percent of national output and New York at about 8 percent.

Measured against countries rather than states, California passed Japan for fourth place in the world in April 2025. The site writes “top five” rather than a fixed rank because the ordering moves with exchange rates and revisions, and a rank stated to the digit would be wrong within a year.

Roughly **39.4 million** people live in California. Every Nordic country combined comes to about 28 million. The state already operates the largest public university system in the country, a court system larger than most national judiciaries, an independent electrical grid operator, and a water infrastructure spanning hundreds of miles.

The scale settles one thing only, and it is worth stating precisely. It does not establish that California should be independent. It establishes that California is in the range of societies where self-government is unremarkable, which removes the objection that the question is absurd on its face. Fuller treatment at /the-case/scale (<https://calexitnow.com/the-case/scale>).

SECTION 3

Representation

California has 39,355,309 residents and two seats in the United States Senate. Wyoming has 588,753 and the same two seats. A Wyoming resident carries about 67 times the Senate weight of a Californian.

This is the design rather than a defect. The Connecticut Compromise of 1787 exists precisely because the small states would not join a union that apportioned both chambers by population. The question is not whether the Senate was intended to work this way. It is whether a society of 39 million is well served by it in 2026.

The House is nearly fair, and that matters to the honesty of the argument. California holds 52 seats, one fewer than before the 2020 census, which works out to roughly 757,000 residents per district against Wyoming's single at-large seat for 588,753. A Wyoming resident carries about 1.3 times the House weight of a Californian. The House has been capped at 435 seats since the Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929, so population growth no longer earns representation, it redistributes it.

The Electoral College sits between the two. California has 54 electoral votes for 39.4 million people, about 729,000 residents per elector. Wyoming has 3 for 588,753, about 196,000 per elector, giving a Wyoming resident roughly 3.7 times the presidential weight of a Californian.

Other federations face the same tension and resolve it differently. Australia elects 12 senators from every state, so New South Wales with about 8.5 million people has the same delegation as Tasmania with about 575,000, a ratio of roughly 15 to 1. Nobody regards Australia as illegitimate for it. A design producing 15 to 1 is a compromise. One producing 67 to 1 is a compromise carrying a load it was never sized for.

The structural feature of this problem is that it cannot be fixed from inside. Article V protects equal Senate representation from amendment without the consent of every affected state. Fuller treatment at [/the-case/representation](https://calexitnow.com/the-case/representation) (<https://calexitnow.com/the-case/representation>).

SECTION 4

Fiscal capacity

Most arguments about California and federal money are arguments about fairness. This one is about capacity, which is a narrower question and an answerable one: could California fund California.

In **eight of the nine years from 2015 to 2023**, federal taxes paid by Californians and California businesses exceeded everything Washington spent in the state. In 2022 the gap was **\$101 billion** in a single year. These figures come from the California Budget & Policy Center, analyzing Rockefeller Institute of Government balance of payments data, and exclude temporary pandemic spending.

Two cautions belong with that number. Borrowed money spent in a state is not a transfer from that state's taxpayers, and balance of payments accounting is sensitive to how federal retirement and interest costs are attributed. Neither caution reverses the direction of the flow across nine years.

What the figures settle is capacity rather than desirability. A jurisdiction that has been a net contributor at this scale for most of a decade is not a jurisdiction that would obviously be unable to fund its own government. What it would actually cost, and what obligations would transfer, is precisely what a commission would establish. Fuller treatment at [/the-case/money](https://calexitnow.com/the-case/money) (<https://calexitnow.com/the-case/money>).

SECTION 5

Earned benefits

The most effective argument against California independence is a Social Security check. It is effective because it is personal, immediate, and aimed at people who cannot absorb being wrong. On its central claim it is also false.

In December 2025 the Social Security Administration was paying **6,813,640** Californians, sending just under \$13 billion into the state in that month alone. The claim made against independence is that those payments would stop.

The rule is otherwise. Social Security retirement benefits are earned entitlements that follow the person, and the United States already pays them to beneficiaries living abroad. It maintains **31 bilateral totalization agreements** governing exactly this situation, covering Australia, Japan, Canada, the United Kingdom, most of Europe, Brazil, Chile, South Korea and Uruguay. The count is 31 as of 1 September 2026, the date the United States and Romania agreement entered into force.

Medicare travels differently and the distinction is real: Medicare generally does not cover care received outside the United States, and that is a genuine question for negotiation rather than one this paper can resolve. What is not in question is the central claim. The earned benefits of 6.8 million people are not a hostage. Fuller treatment at [/the-case/benefits](https://calexitnow.com/the-case/benefits) (<https://calexitnow.com/the-case/benefits>).

SECTION 6

The legal position

The United States Constitution sets out how a state joins the Union. Article IV, Section 3 gives Congress the power to admit new states. On how a state might leave, the document says nothing at all.

That gap was filled once. In *Texas v. White* (1869), Chief Justice Salmon Chase held that Texas had never lawfully left the Union and that its ordinance of secession was void, and described the Union as perpetual and indissoluble. Opponents of independence quote that far.

The sentence continues. The Union is indissoluble, Chase wrote, **except through revolution, or through consent of the States**. Those last five words are the whole matter. The Court did not hold that a state can never leave. It held that a state cannot leave unilaterally. Consent is a condition, and a condition is not a prohibition. In the 157 years since, no decision has established what satisfying that condition would require, because no state has attempted it.

This is not a movement reading. California's own Legislative Analyst's Office, the Legislature's nonpartisan research arm, has cited *Texas v. White* and its bearing on California independence on three separate occasions: August 2015, January 2017 and July 2017.

What consent would require is genuinely unsettled. In 2017 Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean of the UC Berkeley School of Law, said a simple majority vote of Congress could suffice. Other scholars read Article V and conclude that only a constitutional amendment would do. The distance between those two readings is the distance between a hard political fight and a much harder one, and settling it is one of the questions the Resolution puts. Fuller treatment at [/the-case/law](https://calexitnow.com/the-case/law) (<https://calexitnow.com/the-case/law>).

SECTION 7

Public opinion

In June 2025 YouGov surveyed 500 California adults for the Independent California Institute. Three numbers came out of that survey.

QUESTION	RESULT
California would be better off as an independent country	56% agree
California would be better off with special autonomous status	71% agree
Ballot measure declaring intent to withdraw peacefully and lawfully	44% yes, 54% no

YouGov for the Independent California Institute, June 2025, 500 California adults.

The third number is the one that works against the argument, and it belongs in the same table as the other two. A campaign needing 44 percent to become 51 percent by next November would be a campaign built on hope. Ten points is the distance, and it is made of specific unanswered questions rather than general hostility, which is the reason the ask is an inquiry rather than a ballot measure.

A separate YouGov survey in February 2025 measured something different. Asked directly, 27 percent said California should leave the United States. Adding those who said it should not leave but were willing to consider the question produces 51 percent who have not closed it. That is not 51 percent support and this paper does not present it as support. It is 51 percent willing to hear the argument, which is a smaller claim.

Underneath the headline question, majorities appear for the substance: 80 percent want California to control its borders with other states in the manner of a country, 74 percent support a state citizenship for residents who are not US citizens, and 50 percent trust Sacramento more than Washington against 23 percent who say the reverse.

Two disclosures belong with these figures. The Independent California Institute commissioned the June 2025 and January 2025 surveys and advocates for independence; YouGov fielded them. A sample of 500 adults carries a margin of error of roughly five points. Fuller treatment, including the five rules this movement applies to polling, at /the-case/polling (<https://calexitnow.com/the-case/polling>).

SECTION 8

The ask

Nothing in this paper asks anyone to support independence. It asks for an inquiry.

The Joint Resolution before the Legislature would establish a commission to examine the questions above and report within twelve months, with majority and minority findings printed together. It declares nothing, spends nothing until the Legislature appropriates, and commits the state to no outcome.

The reason to support it is the same whether you favor independence or oppose it. If the case is weak, an official inquiry is how that gets established on the record. If it is strong, the same is true. What serves nobody is the present position, in which the largest economy in the United States has never once asked what its own options are.

The Resolution is drafted and has no author. The companion paper, The Blue-Ribbon Commission (<https://calexitnow.com/papers/blue-ribbon-commission>), describes what that body would be and what Scotland did with comparable bodies before each of its referendums.

SECTION 9

References

1. Public Policy Institute of California, *California's Economy*; US Census Bureau QuickFacts, Vintage 2025 estimates.
2. US Census Bureau QuickFacts, population estimates as of 1 July 2025 (California 39,355,309; Wyoming 588,753).
3. Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929, 46 Stat. 21.
4. California Budget & Policy Center, analyzing Rockefeller Institute of Government balance of payments data, federal fiscal years 2015 to 2023, excluding temporary pandemic spending.
5. Social Security Administration, California beneficiary counts and payments, December 2025.
6. Social Security Administration, international agreements (totalization), count current to 1 September 2026.
7. US Department of the Treasury, *Financial Report of the United States Government*, FY2025, statement of social insurance.
8. *Texas v. White*, 74 U.S. (7 Wall.) 700 (1869), opinion of Chase, C.J. Full opinion.
9. California Legislative Analyst's Office, initiative analyses of August 2015, January 2017 and July 2017.
10. YouGov for the Independent California Institute, June 2025, 500 California adults.
11. YouGov, February 2025, California sample.

Prepared by CalExitNow.com. Corrections to press@calexitnow.com.