For most of our history, Nevada has hitched its cart to just one industry at a time – mining, divorce, gambling, and then construction. Now folks ask whether gaming or construction will bounce back, or, if renewable energy can save us.

There is no silver bullet. Gaming may bounce back a little, but it is now a global, competitive industry. And, renewable energy may provide our economy with a boost, but I am not sure it will create many in-state jobs.

Instead, we have to do the hard work. We can’t bribe firms to move here with no taxes, but we can attract them if we provide a workforce that will make them profitable. We have to stop thinking of education as a consumption good, and instead see it as an investment. The payoff will take time, but in the best-performing states and countries, education and worker productivity matter a lot more than tax rates. New industries will come from new ideas. So, the resources we need are the people who create new ideas and solutions, and the workforce to implement them.

Regarding Nevada’s budget crisis, we’ve been looking at this the wrong way. Our political tribalism blinds us to the fact that we have more in common than not. We are like Giants fans who choose to hate the other team, and forget to just love baseball. Good plays can be made by players on both teams, and good policies can come from both parties. Bad policies too.

We can’t spend our way to prosperity or solve problems just by throwing money at them. But, we also can’t cut our way to prosperity. Businesses don’t prosper by saying they can’t afford to invest, and neither can the state.

Nevada Republicans and Democrats will have to work together, and not retreat to their partisan positions and their tired old slogans.

Republicans will need to concede that we might need to find new revenues to make up for the ones few people are paying any more. We need to figure out a better tax structure than the one we have. An efficient tax has low rates but a broad base. Getting the lion’s share from a declining industry such as gaming is bad policy, as is taxing only merchandise but not services, and taxing only merchandise sold in brick-and-mortar stores.

Similarly, Democrats need to concede that there are bad policies we have enshrined in state law that can make our state budgets grow too fast. The university system has a defined contribution for retirement, not a defined benefit, and the entire state government should move toward that. We need to take steps to reduce the ever-expanding costs of providing medical care. Collective bargaining rules have meant that some public sector employees are paid more than labor market conditions would require, especially for some sectors of local government. This needs to be addressed. Tying pay to performance is usually a good idea too, if we can measure performance.

We need to start by deciding what it is we need the state to provide, and figure out how to provide it the best we know how. Then, we need to figure out how to pay for what we need. We can’t just stop providing human services, especially when unemployment is so high. We can’t abandon our responsibility to educate our citizens. We can’t empty out our prisons, stop trying to prevent crime, or stop putting out fires. We need to figure out what type of society we want to create, how our K-12 system can compete, and how our universities can produce the research our state needs and keep our best students in the state.

If we aren’t willing to dig in and do this hard work, together, without political tribalism, then we ought to all just give up now and move. The last person who leaves can turn back in our statehood.

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