Good morning.

Here is the headline I woke up to today:

TODAY'S PAPER OCTOBER 21, 2050

California Current



California Ends the Great Trade-Off: No One Has to Leave Home to Find Opportunity.

Twenty-five years after putting community wealth and belonging at the center of climate policy, every region of California is becoming a place where people can stay, prosper, and shape what comes next.

Alvaro Sanchez, Blueprints for Belonging Senior Fellow

LET ME TELL YOU WHAT THAT HEADLINE LOOKS LIKE IN THE LIFE OF ONE CALIFORNIAN.



Her name is Elena. She lives in the Central Valley, a few blocks from the home where she grew up.

This morning, she walks her daughter to a shaded, all-electric school. During heat waves, it becomes a neighborhood resilience center, with clean backup power, cooling, food, health services, and people Elena knows and trusts.



Elena works at a locally owned company that turns agricultural waste into low-carbon building materials. It is a good job, with predictable hours, family-supporting wages, and a path to ownership.

Her home is affordable, efficient, and insurable. A community land trust keeps it within reach for the next family. A neighborhood-owned energy project lowers her electricity bill and returns part of the value it creates to the community.

When Elena's parents need care, they do not have to leave the region. And when her daughter imagines her future, she does not assume opportunity exists somewhere else.



She may choose to leave. But she will not be forced to leave in order to survive.

THAT is the achievement behind the headline.

California did not eliminate wildfires, heat waves, floods, or economic disruption. We did something more reliable, something more human.

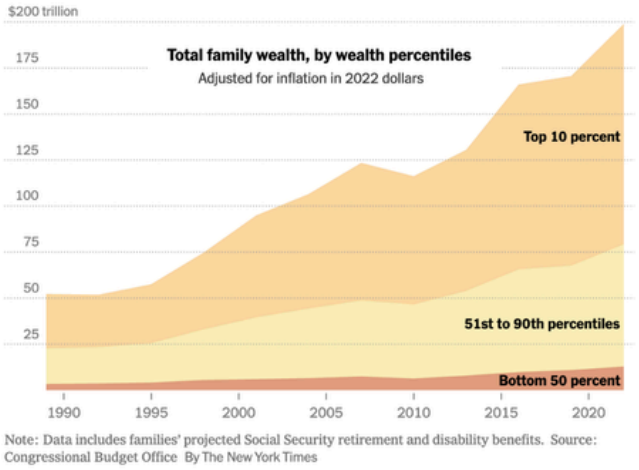
We made sure a crisis no longer meant losing everything.





America Has Never Been Wealthier. Here's Why It Doesn't Feel That Way.

The richest 10% of U.S. families held 69% of wealth, while the bottom 50% held 3%, according to Congressional Budget Office



Note: Data includes families' projected Social Security retirement and disability benefits. Source: Congressional Budget Office By The New York Times

"America Has Never Been Wealthier. Here's Why It Doesn't Feel That Way."
— The New York Times, March 31, 2025.

TO UNDERSTAND HOW, WE FIRST HAD TO NAME THE ROOT PROBLEM.

For generations, our economy had been organized around extraction.

It extracted resources from the land without accounting for what was destroyed. It extracted labor from workers without returning a fair share of the wealth they created. And it concentrated ownership and decision-making power far from the communities living with the consequences.

That same system produced both the climate crisis and an economy in which too many people worked hard, did everything asked of them, and still remained one disaster, one rent increase, or one medical bill away from losing everything.

We could not solve that problem simply by replacing fossil-fuels with clean energy while leaving the underlying economic relationships intact.

A solar project could still extract wealth. A resilient neighborhood could still become too expensive for longtime residents to remain.

So we made a different choice.



Graphic from: Public Finance for the Future We Want

We decided that climate policy would not only reduce emissions. It would change who owns, who benefits, who decides, and who belongs.

The breakthrough was a new definition of success.

We still asked how much we built and how much carbon we reduced. But we also asked: Who owns what we built? Who can afford to live here afterward? Who gained wealth? Who had the power to decide? And did the people living through this transformation have a real place in it?

We learned that belonging was not a feeling we added after the economy worked.

BELONGING WAS EVIDENCE THAT WE BUILT AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FORE EVERYONE.

So, how did we get here?

First we listened. Communities stopped being treated as project sites and became designers, partners, and owners. We treated lived experience as expertise, compensated people for it, and gave communities real governing power.

Second, we rooted shared prosperity. Public investments carried public conditions: strong labor standards, community-benefit agreements, community land trusts, and public finance. We stopped celebrating a project simply because it was green. We asked whether it made the people living beside it more secure.

Third, we invested in civic infrastructure. The leaders, community organizations, public servants, and regional partnerships that allow people to act together. A grant can fund one project. Civic infrastructure gives a community the power to build the next one.

And fourth, government organized around outcomes people could see and feel: lower costs, good jobs, stable homes, reduced climate risk, community wealth, and real power over the future.

Programs that once operated in silos began working together around people and places. A family was no longer offered solar panels without help repairing the roof beneath them. A worker was no longer trained for an industry with no regional strategy to create jobs. A community was no longer asked to host infrastructure without sharing in its benefits.

We learned to build not merely faster, but at the speed of trust.

The remarkable thing is that this future did not begin in 2050.

IT WAS ALREADY TAKING SHAPE IN 2026.

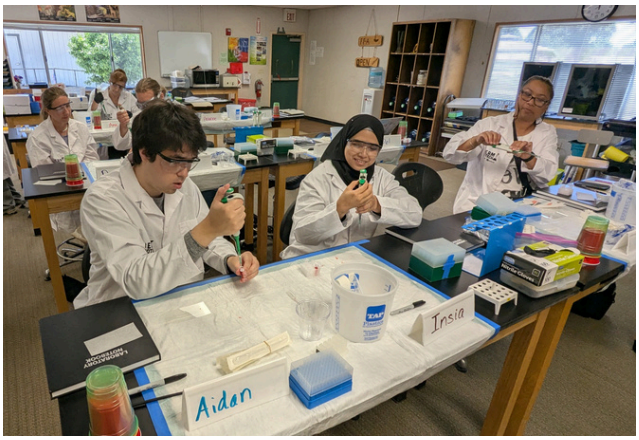
In San Ysidro, Casa Familiar built La Semilla, a community climate-resilience center designed as an emergency resource, living classroom, and neighborhood-scale demonstration of environmental justice.





In the North San Joaquin Valley, BEAM Circular brought together and organized a local ecosystem to build a circular bioeconomy from the region's own resources, showing how environmental solutions could generate inclusive economic opportunity.





These were not side projects at the margins of California's economy.

They were early blueprints for a different one.

They showed that communities closest to our greatest challenges were not waiting to be rescued. They were already designing solutions of the future.

Our responsibility was to recognize that work, resource it, and bring it to scale, without stripping away the community leadership that made it possible.

By 2050, California was delivering prosperity with belonging at its center.

But that future was not inevitable.

It happened because people in rooms like this one made a different set of choices.

They refused to accept that some communities would always be sacrifice zones.
They refused to accept that working families would always be one disaster away from losing everything.

And then they did more than refuse.

They organized. They invested. They built institutions. They shared power.

The future will not be built by waiting for someone else to solve our problems.
It will be built by people who refuse to accept that scarcity is inevitable, and who choose to create prosperity with belonging at the center.

So let us make that choice.

LET US BUILD AN ECONOMY WHERE EVERYONE HAS ENOUGH, EVERYONE HAS A STAKE, EVERYONE HAS A VOICE, AND EVERYONE FEELS LIKE THEY BELONG.



The extractive economy was built through choices. A different economy will be built the same way.

Whether it becomes true depends on what we choose to build together, starting now.

Author Bio:



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Alvaro S. Sanchez is a strategic racial equity and climate justice leader who turns bold ideas into tangible results. He has spent more than fifteen years designing and executing multi-sector strategies that move billions in public and private dollars toward communities of color. As the former Vice-President of Policy at The Greenlining Institute and now the Blueprints for Belonging Senior Fellow at The Just Solutions Collective, Alvaro has led initiatives such as Greenlining the Block, the Towards Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) community of practice, and Blueprints for Belonging, each building durable civic infrastructure and field capacity. His policy work spans state, federal, and local arenas, from advocating for California's Office of Racial Equity to establishing the Transformative Climate Communities state program via legislation to shaping California Climate Investments and Justice40 implementation. He previously served on the board of the Urban Sustainability Directors Network and currently serves on the advisory board of the UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation. A sought-after author and commentator, Alvaro's thought leadership helps policymakers, advocates, and funders connect racial equity, climate action, and shared prosperity in practical, scalable ways.