

Viewpoint: APEC is Coming

Sean Randolph – April 28, 2023

Later this year San Francisco will host the largest international government event ever held in the Bay Area and the most consequential since the founding of the United Nations at its Opera House in 1945. From November 12-28 as many as 21 heads of government and dozens of foreign ministers, trade ministers, and finance ministers organized by APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) will descend on the city. Not well-known to most Americans, APEC is an international body that supports regional cooperation on economic issues – starting with trade but going well beyond. Unlike the WTO it doesn't negotiate formal trade agreements but instead provides a platform that enables members to work together.

During Leaders Week senior government officials will arrive first, followed by trade, finance and economic ministers. Then come the heads of government. As the host President Biden will be there. In all probability so will Xi Jinping, the Prime Minister of Japan and many others. Running at the same time will be a CEO Summit with more than 300 CEOs and business leaders from across the region. In all between government, business and media more than 10,000 visitors are expected.

The event is an opportunity for the Bay Area and San Francisco at many levels. One is immediate: at a time when large events are few and far between, delegates will fill hotels and downtown's bars and restaurants. Moscone Center will be ground zero for both government and business meetings.

The bigger opportunity, though, is to rehabilitate San Francisco's global image. Global media has not been kind to the city of late, often with good reason. Homelessness and crime – real issues – and widespread tech layoffs convey a dystopic image of a city in decline. Residents traveling abroad are often confronted with the question "What's happened to San Francisco?" The answer can be a long story but is never as bad as listeners expect.

APEC is an opportunity for the region to put its best foot forward. This assumes, of course, that San Francisco can clean up its streets before November. There are important reasons why San Francisco was chosen to host the APEC Leaders Meeting over other U.S. cities that were competing. The quality of its hotels and air connections are second to none. It's a global business and economic center and a key link for the U.S. to Asia. The Bay Area's population is richly Asian, providing deeper links. Most

important, the Bay Area is recognized worldwide as the leading center for technology, innovation and entrepreneurship on the planet and a place where big problems are addressed.

That's why APEC came to San Francisco. If the city and the region play their cards right the world will be reminded of the extraordinary creativity, research and innovation that happens here, and they'll be back.

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