POWER IN PARTNERSHIP

HOW A WINNING COALITION OF ENTERTAINMENT UNIONS, GUILDS AND THE PGA SECURED LEGISLATION THAT MORE THAN DOUBLES CALIFORNIA'S FILM INCENTIVE PROGRAM.

WRITTEN BY PAULA BERNSTEIN

It was a much-needed dose of good news last summer when the California state legislature approved Governor Gavin Newsom's proposal to more than double the state's film incentive program—from $330 million to $750 million annually. Years in the making, the win was the culmination of an intense, monthslong campaign to curb runaway production and to keep film and TV jobs in California.

"Given the economic climate in the state and all of the difficult choices before elected leaders, we knew this would be a challenge," says Entertainment Union Coalition (EUC) president and DGA western executive director Rebecca Rhine. "But the unions came together in an unprecedented way."

For a production community that had endured years of back-to-back disruptions, the win was hard-earned. Corporate consolidation, shrinking global production, escalating competition from other states and countries with more generous tax incentives, and the fallout from devastating wildfires had all combined to create a sense of urgency.

"The message was clear: If you want to keep California strong in the face of everything that's coming, don't let the industry disappear," says Kathy Garmezy, EUC strategic advisor.

From the moment Newsom introduced the proposal, Hollywood unions, independent producers and key industry stakeholders came together to align their priorities and to present a unified front.

"What was remarkable about the whole endeavor was the ability of all of the industry unions to come together to speak in one voice, which then brought the support of all of the unions throughout the entire state," says Thom Davis, president of the California IATSE Council.

Through months of coordinated advocacy, the coalition successfully ushered the California Film and Television Jobs Act 4.0 into law—thanks in no small part to the leadership of Rhine and Garmezy, who helped rally the team.

"None of this would have been possible without their leadership," says Susan Sprung, CEO of the Producers Guild of America.

A WINNING COALITION

The EUC—a coalition representing the American Federation of Musicians, California IATSE Council, Directors Guild of America, LiUNA! Local 724, SAG-AFTRA, Teamsters Local 399, and Writers Guild of America West—launched its Keep California Rolling campaign in February 2025. Together, they mobilized their 165,000 members, as well as key constituencies from across the state, to rally behind the cause.

Above: Union and guild members representing the Entertainment Union Coalition (EUC) at a lobbying day at the California state capitol in Sacramento.

Below: PGA President Stephanie Allain and former PGA President Lori McCreary joined EUC representatives, Governor Gavin Newsom, community leaders, and local officials at Burbank's Ranch Lot Studios for a press conference on July 2, 2025, announcing the expansion of California's Film and Television Tax Credit Program.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF EUC

Sprung and the PGA valued the opportunity to work with Rhine and Garmezy on the Keep California Rolling campaign. "They were great partners. We loved working with them," says Sprung. "They listened to all the producers' concerns and tried hard to achieve as many things as possible."

Collaboration allowed unions and guilds to magnify their efforts. "From the start, SAG-AFTRA and our sister unions understood that unity was our greatest strength," says Kerri Wood Einertson, SAG-AFTRA executive director of government affairs and public policy as well as vice president of the EUC. "We may represent different crafts, but our collective members all depend on steady, local production work."

The EUC led a massive letter-writing campaign, sending more than 100,000 letters to Sacramento urging support for SB630 and AB1138, which would expand production tax credits and broaden eligibility for the program.

"Keeping production jobs in California benefits workers across the entertainment industry, and having members of all of the entertainment unions speaking collectively to legislators about Program 4.0 was very powerful," says WGA West political and legislative director Shelagh Wagener.

Without collaboration, "it never would have happened," says Lindsay Dougherty, secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Local 399. "It would not have gotten done with only the Teamsters working on it or only SAG working on it. We needed to all work together."

While hundreds of film workers headed to Sacramento to make their case directly, others invited lawmakers to see production in action across California. "It was important to showcase the strength we have when we work together. It was a huge team effort," says Alex Aguilar, secretary-treasurer of LiUNA! Local 724.

CRAFTING THE MESSAGE

The message was clear: California's grip as the world's entertainment capital was slipping. Without state action, thousands of middle-class jobs—and the vast network of businesses that depend on them—were at risk of leaving the state. Productions don't just hire crews; they feed them, house them, and keep countless caterers, hotels and dry cleaners busy across the state. That ripple effect extends beyond Hollywood to the rest of the state.

"We knew early on that the story we wanted to tell was about working families and what this industry brings to California," said Rhine. "The goal was to create as many jobs as we could and to have the jobs be working-class family jobs throughout the state."

Part of the challenge was pushing back against the perception that tax credits merely pad the pockets of wealthy Hollywood producers and stars. Lawmakers have long fretted that their constituents might not approve of what they might view as handouts to studios at a time of budget cuts and economic uncertainty. The EUC knew they had to dispel that notion if they wanted this campaign to succeed.

Michael Cooper Jr., Regina King and Lovie Simone behind the scenes of the Netflix series *Forever*, a beneficiary of California's tax credit expansion.

PHOTO COURTESY ELIZABETH MORRIS/NETFLIX

"It was through the stories of the workers who had been impacted by the relocation of jobs that we were able to convince the legislators that this was not a corporate giveaway, but an investment," says Davis.

It was essential for the EUC to emphasize that the film incentive program chiefly benefits below-the-line workers—those who rely on steady paychecks and health coverage to support their families.

"My union, Local 724, 75% of our membership is minority, the most of any union or guild in Hollywood," says Aguilar. "I represent people who are working people, construction workers and janitors. If they're not working, their families aren't getting fed. They're not paying bills."

To drive that message home, Aguilar says it was essential for vendors and small business owners to testify in Sacramento. Hundreds of members attended in person, while an EUC-produced video reinforced the reality that working-class jobs were at risk.

"Each member of the EUC brought unique things to contribute to the campaign," says Garmezy. "Some were more effective at getting people on the ground to show support, and others had relationships with different legislators in different parts of the state."

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—THOM DAVIS, PRESIDENT OF THE CALIFORNIA IATSE COUNCIL

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Fallout relocated to California for season 2, thanks to the state’s tax credit expansion.

THE ROLE OF PRODUCERS

Producers also played a pivotal role, offering firsthand insight into what it truly takes to keep production rooted in California—from navigating tight budgets to managing location logistics and balancing the rising costs of labor and infrastructure. They understood firsthand the economic pressures and competition driving projects out of state, as well as the cascading impact those losses have on local jobs, vendors and small businesses.

“Having producers involved was essential because they decide where projects get made. Their insight into budgeting, financing and production logistics helped shape a tax credit program that’s both competitive and workable in the real world,” says Einertson. “By working with producers, we could ensure that the incentives were strong enough to attract productions while still serving the interests of performers and crew.”

The push to expand California’s film tax incentive underscored exceptional industry unity, with producers, guilds and below-the-line workers aligning behind a shared goal.

“Expanding the California tax incentive strengthens the entire industry,” says Wagener. “Having that perspective represented by PGA and independent producers along with the crew, actors, writers, directors, laborers and musicians showed how unified the industry is in support of keeping production in California.”

According to Garmezy, securing the California Film and Television Jobs Act 4.0 required balancing what was needed to enable producers to shoot in California with the reality of what could pass in Sacramento. “PGA was a strong and effective voice for producers because Susan Sprung’s advocacy was grounded in that understanding,” Garmezy says.

Rhine agrees, adding, “This industry is dependent on all its stakeholders working collaboratively to find the path forward. Susan and the PGA were key in making connections, facilitating conversations and helping to bridge gaps.”

Compromises were part of the deal, but the mission never wavered: Get the bill passed by the deadline and get Hollywood back to work ASAP. With the clock ticking and production jobs on the line, the coalition doubled down—coordinating strategy, fine-tuning messaging and maintaining pressure on lawmakers until they crossed the finish line.

The goal wasn’t only to win a policy fight; it was to jump-start a stalled industry and to prove that when Hollywood labor unites, meaningful change can happen. “At the end of the day, we did the best we could for as many stakeholders as we could. I think the results speak for themselves,” says Rhine. ■