



A Regional Initiative to Create Jobs and Economic Growth through a New Entertainment and Sports Complex

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, June 7, 2012

Contact: Jeremiah Jackson
Phone: 415-938-6424

Think BIG Announces New Leadership Team

Mayor's former Chief of Staff and Special Assistant to join Think BIG Team

SACRAMENTO – Today, *Think BIG* announced the hiring of Kunal Merchant as Executive Director and R.E. Graswich as a Project Manager.

Merchant will succeed outgoing Executive Director Chris Lehane, who launched the initiative in partnership with Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson and will continue to serve Think BIG in a strategic and advisory capacity.

“Sacramento owes a huge debt of gratitude to Chris for his exceptional work building *Think BIG*,” said Merchant. “The Mayor and Chris have always envisioned this as something bigger than basketball or even an arena. *Think BIG* is really a platform for our region to come together and pursue the kind of transformative economic, cultural and civic development we know Sacramento needs and deserves. We have a strong foundation to build on and I’m excited about the possibilities moving ahead.”

Merchant joins *Think BIG* following his tenure as Mayor Johnson’s Chief of Staff. Merchant played an integral role in the Mayor’s economic development agenda, including efforts to revitalize downtown, save the Sacramento Kings franchise, and develop a new entertainment and sports complex.

As Executive Director, Merchant will lead *Think BIG*’s ongoing efforts to refocus its work following the end of discussions with the Sacramento Kings to build a downtown entertainment and sports complex by 2015. Working with the Mayor’s Office, Think BIG is currently exploring potential alternative “Plan B” options for development of a catalytic civic infrastructure project at the downtown Railyards.

Also joining *Think BIG* will be R.E. Graswich, who previously served as a Special Assistant to Mayor Johnson. During his tenure, Graswich was a key advisor to the Mayor on media, communications, City Council, and community relations. In his capacity as a Project Manager, Graswich will oversee *Think BIG*’s public engagement activities and communications, and serve as a liaison to Think BIG committee members and stakeholders.

Kunal Merchant served as Mayor Johnson’s Chief of Staff from December 2008 to June 2012 where he provided oversight over the full range of Mayor’s Office activities. Prior to that, Merchant served as a Senior Associate at Katzenbach Partners, Director of Selection for the New York City Teaching Fellows program and Director of Project HEALTH D.C, a Washington, DC-based health care nonprofit. Merchant has a B.A. in Economics from Harvard University and an M.B.A from Harvard Business School.

R.E. Graswich served as Special Assistant to Mayor Johnson from August 2009 to June 2012. Prior to entering public service, R.E. spent 37 years in journalism and broadcasting, including more than three decades with the Sacramento Bee as a reporter and columnist before moving to broadcast journalism. He co-anchored the afternoon news on KFBK radio and did commentaries for CBS 13 television and writes a monthly column for



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Sacramento Magazine.

Think BIG is a regional initiative launched by Mayor Kevin Johnson in 2011 to promote job creation, economic growth, cultural development and civic pride across the greater Sacramento metropolitan area. For more information, visit www.thinkbigsacramento.org.

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