

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

CAPITOL NOTEBOOK: TIMES SACRAMENTO BUREAU

Slashing and bashing

Contra Costa Times

Article Launched: 01/13/2008 03:02:41 AM PST

Week in review

Slashing and bashing

GOVERNOR READY TO CUT: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger calls for deep cuts in education, social services, parks and prisons in his proposed budget.

The lowdown: In doing so, the governor has picked fights with some of the most powerful players in town -- the California Teachers Association, the prison guards union, legislative Democrats who will write the budget bill and fiscal conservatives who see his fee increase proposals as tax increases.

State of the State

MONEY MATTERS: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger gives a more subdued State of the State address, calling for major budget reform that creates spending caps.

The lowdown: Neither lawmakers nor voters were interested in such reform in earlier, better years. We'll see how they react when faced with the prospect of huge program cuts.

Health care moving forward?

BILL GETS A CHECK-UP: Senate leader Don Perata, D-Oakland, announces that the Senate's health committee will take up the Assembly health care reform bill this week.

The lowdown: It's expected the Senate will eventually pass it and the governor will sign it. But a more precarious problem looms: Will voters pass it?

Low times for Hy-way?

OUT OF GAS: Pacific Gas and Electric says it has abandoned plans to build a large-scale fueling station for fuel-cell powered vehicles in San Carlos -- an important stop on the governor's envisioned hydrogen highway.

The lowdown: The problem with the governor's vision -- if we build them (fueling stations) they (hydrogen motorists) will come -- is that the building them part has become a big if.

Death penalty debate

FLAWS IN EXECUTION: The California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice begins an expansive review of the state's death penalty system.

The lowdown: The review isn't about the merits of the death penalty, but how to carry it out more effectively. That said, one solution offered was scaling back the number of cases eligible for death penalty prosecution.

Political horsetrading

GIVE A LITTLE, GET A LITTLE: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plan to face "our budget demons" -- by creating a spending cap on state revenues -- might be dismissed by Democrats as so much conservative parsimony in a

Advertisement

TARGET COUPON

EXPIRES 3/8/08

FREE Twenty 4x6" basic prints

Offer available at Target One-hour Photo Labs. Go to Target.com/photo for the location nearest you. One-hour service limited to machine capacity. Limit one item or offer per coupon. Offer not available for prints made on the Kodak Picture Kiosk. Void if copied, transferred, purchased, sold or prohibited by law. No cash value. Maximum retail value \$4.40 for combined free offer.



Print Powered By FormatDynamics

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

typical year.

But in a year with painful budget choices facing legislators as they try to dig out of a \$14 billion deficit, Democrats might see the proposal as an opportunity to negotiate for reforms they've long been seeking.

For instance, remember last year's two-month budget stalemate? That could be a thing of the past if Republicans agreed to give up the two-thirds vote requirement to pass a budget. That would give Democrats, once and for all, a free hand in crafting the budget without worrying about Republican lawmakers holding it hostage.

Republicans, on the other hand, would have less reason to worry about Democratic spending if the budget system controlled it for them.

The spending cap proposal, which Schwarzenegger introduced last week during his State of the State address, would set up a rainy day fund into which excess revenues -- over what would be established as a 10-year average -- would be deposited and used only in down years.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, said Schwarzenegger and Republicans have to give something to get a spending cap, which, as a constitutional amendment, would need a two-thirds vote from the two legislative chambers just to get on the ballot.

"In the spirit of post-partisanship, if you want to do a spending cap, it cannot be a one-sided proposal," Nunez said. "It's got to be a more inclusive and a more diverse proposal that reflects more than just conservative views.

"I'm not saying we'd jump on that, but that's a conversation that at least me and

my caucus would be willing to have."

Schwarzenegger needs help from Democrats on this. They defeated an earlier legislative attempt for a spending cap. Rebuffed, Schwarzenegger took it to the voters in 2005.

But he didn't have much luck with them, either. Voters rejected his ballot measure.

Wave pool safety

SWIMMING AT THE CAPITOL: The accidental drowning of a 4-year-old boy in Great America amusement park last summer will come to the attention of state officials this week by a San Jose legislator pushing a measure to make wave pools safer for children.

Sen. Elaine Alquist, D-San Jose, has proposed a law to create statewide safety standards at the popular swimming pools, which feature mechanically-created waves at regular intervals. Among the requirements: Wave pool operators must provide free life vests, children under 4 feet tall would have to wear a life vest and be accompanied by an adult, pool operators must sound a 15-second audible signal before wave action starts, and lifeguards would have to respond to distressed guests within 20 seconds.

Some of the requirements in her measure, SB-107, are similar to rules Great America voluntarily implemented after the July 12 drowning of Carlos Alejandro Flores.

The bill will be presented at the Senate Health Committee on Wednesday.

Alquist, a grandmother of a 2-year-old and a 6-year-old, was touched by the death of Carlos at Great America's Great Barrier Reef. His mother

Advertisement

TARGET COUPON

EXPIRES 3/8/08

FREE Twenty 4x6" basic prints

Offer available at Target One-hour Photo Labs. Go to Target.com/photo for the location nearest you. One-hour service limited to machine capacity. Limit one item or offer per coupon. Offer not available for prints made on the Kodak Picture Kiosk. Void if copied, transferred, purchased, sold or prohibited by law. No cash value. Maximum retail value \$4.40 for combined free offer.



9860-0113-2647-6849-0376-5800-88

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

and sister also were at the pool area when a lifeguard found him floating in nearly 3 feet of water.

Reforming for tires

ALL ABOUT THE BENJAMINS: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposes releasing non-violent prison offenders, while stemming the flow of parolees sent back to prison on technical violations. He also wants to focus attention on the 98 school districts that are not meeting the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act.

In a different year, those might have been hailed as important reform measures.

But in Sacramento -- at least this year -- everything is about money. More specifically, it's about a gaping \$14 billion budget deficit that has derailed the governor's once proclaimed "year of education," jeopardizes voter support for universal health care and threatens virtually any good idea that comes with a price tag.

First, those 98 "under-performing" districts. In Schwarzenegger's State of the State address he smartly focused on the need to immediately help the children in those schools. But it's no secret in Sacramento that what's compelling this decision is the possibility of losing \$3 billion in federal funding if the state doesn't respond -- a condition of No Child Left Behind.

Second, those 22,000-plus prisoners. While some have argued that California simply locks up too many people for too long -- especially non-violent criminals -- and is too quick to send people back to prison, that philosophy isn't what's driving this decision.

Again, it's money and the federal government.

The state's prison system is still under much scrutiny by the feds, who have threatened to take over the system if the state doesn't do something to ease overcrowded prison conditions.

And if there's one thing that's certain, it's that if the state doesn't come up with a satisfactory solution, the feds will -- and it's certain to cost the state big bucks.



Ultimately, the prison and education reforms might be in the best interest of California. That remains to be seen. But what does seem crystal clear -- and a bit sad -- is why the state is doing it.

Compiled by Steven Harmon, Edwin Garcia and Alvie Lindsay of the MediaNews Sacramento Bureau.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

-- State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell's response to the governor's cost-cutting budget proposal.

Advertisement

TARGET COUPON	EXPIRES 3/8/08
<h1 style="margin: 0;">FREE</h1> <h2 style="margin: 0;">Twenty 4x6" basic prints</h2>	
<p>Offer available at Target One-hour Photo Labs. Go to Target.com/photo for the location nearest you. One-hour service limited to machine capacity. Limit one item or offer per coupon. Offer not available for prints made on the Kodak Picture Kiosk. Void if copied, transferred, purchased, sold or prohibited by law. No cash value. Maximum retail value \$4.40 for combined free offer.</p>	
	

Print Powered By 