



# Tidbits from Sacramento

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## **BUDGET, BUDGET, WHERE IS THE BUDGET?**

There is hope! The Governor was in the Capitol several times this week but information was not forthcoming. Yesterday, while “walking the halls” I was told that an agreement was being proposed. I have heard such rumors a number of times without any movement. Therefore, I continued my walk to distribute information on an event I am working on for Monday evening in the Capitol.

However, today’s Sacramento Bee does provide some hope that the information I received may bear fruit. The Bee reported that legislative staffers from both sides of the aisle did meet Friday to work on a compromise and will be working this weekend. – a good sign!. Monday will tell us whether or not this latest information will result in a budget that the Senate can pass. Keep your fingers crossed!!

## **2008 ELECTIONS, FEBRUARY, JUNE, NOVEMBER**

For the past few months, California has had a number of national politicians from both sides of the aisle campaigning and fundraising. By moving the Primary Presidential Election to February, California has reaped visibility as a player in the coming election, one of the stated reasons for this move. The various candidates have certainly cooperated and been able to leave with millions of California dollars in their pockets. However, not only will Californians be voting for a Presidential Candidate, but also for various initiatives and other ballot measures, several of which may be very controversial.

Term limits will definitely be on the February ballot. Supporters and opponents of changing term limits will be raising millions of dollars to promote their version of term limits. In addition there are two initiatives that have already qualified for the February election. The Transportation Funding and the Community College Funding. One of the expected Term Limit Initiatives will be added if and when the Secretary of State Signature Verification Process is completed.

Two Redistricting Constitutional Amendments will most likely qualify for the February ballot as well. Both of these amendments are in the signature gathering process and must complete their signature deadline by September 17 2007. Both will require a minimum of 694,354 valid signatures to be on the ballot.

Twenty-four other initiatives or referenda are in the early stages of the process and may be included either in the February, June or November, 2008 elections. Some of the more interesting titles include Wealth Tax, Mandatory Reporting of Pregnancies, Limit on Marriage, Workers’ Compensation, Internet Poker, High Speed Rail, and Eminent Domain to name a few of the 24 currently in circulation. In addition, another 18 are pending review at the Attorney General’s Office prior to their release for the next step, signature gathering.

## **HEALTHCARE REFORM – WHERE IS IT?**

Last Saturday, August 13, hundreds of Californians took part in 8 different locations to discuss health care reform. It was on various local TV stations. I did watch it on Channel 9 off and on for some time. It was on for many hours and they covered a great many key issues in small table groupings. However, as I look back over the week, the attention given to this event was limited. As I listened to some of the discussions at the various tables in different locales, it was clear that health care remains a major issue for all Californians. However, just as we hear in the legislative arena, there were many differences of opinion on exactly how to “fix” the system.

I can certainly understand the diversity of opinion with regard to reforming health care. On August 8<sup>th</sup> I held a healthcare forum for the National Association of Women Business Owners-California. This was open to the public policy leaders of the various state chapters and to a number of key persons in Sacramento. Our invited presenters included Senator George Runner, California Health Plan President and CEO, Chris Ohman, Richard Figueroa, one of the key staff for the Governor’s plan, and Steve Lindsay on behalf of the Health Underwriters. One of the Speaker’s staff was also invited, but unable to participate.

It was an interesting morning and the attendees learned a great deal from the various presenters. However, the ability to come to consensus as a group of business owners was a daunting task. Many expressed agreement for a specific issue such as health care for all, but when the discussion turned to the implementation including the funding it was challenging to get a unified opinion.

If the budget is resolved in the first few days of the session which will begin on Monday, August 20<sup>th</sup>, we can expect to have the Governor, legislators and others begin to seriously address the health care reform issues. It will be a challenging task to reach any agreement given the very strong positions many legislators and stakeholders have about the “how to fix” the system. Many in the business community are concerned about how to pay for the cost

A suggestion that a half-cent sales tax be considered may be placed on the table. It is estimated to raise about \$2.5 Billion. In order to even discuss this, it will require a major shift in the discussions. Because sales taxes have been cannibalized for other than their stated purpose, such a sales tax, even if agreed to, would need to be put forth as a Constitutional Amendment to prevent any other use of this tax.

Stay tuned, this will be an interesting closure to the first half of the 2007-2008 legislative session which is scheduled to end on September 19.