



Tidbits from Sacramento

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Legislative and Governmental Advocacy
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JANUARY – WHAT A MONTH IT WAS

No matter what side of the issues you were on, there were plenty of ups and downs throughout the entire month for most of us. Clearly, the two major issues, healthcare reform and the states fiscal picture held center stage. However, many folks were just trying to get their bills out of the house of origin by the January 31 deadline.

Moving bills to meet the January deadline often necessitates amending the legislation significantly to succeed in getting the required votes. It is not unusual to totally “gut” a bill and change its content totally. This necessitates a close look at all amended bills as they attempt to move them through the process. All involved keep tabs on these changes. Already a bill I was very concerned about given its amendments was again amended the next day to remove my concerns.

Health Care Reform

So where are we going? The vote that was taken in the Senate Health Committee on Monday, the 28th will be one I remember for a long time. These votes were obviously difficult for some of those on the committee. Nearly every member of the Committee had to explain their position before they voted or abstained. Clearly some believed that they could not vote given the financial information provided to them by the Legislative Analyst, Liz Hill, during the nearly 11 hour hearing on the 23rd of January.

There are those who believe that the Legislative Analyst’s report was used as a cover to allow the Democratic members of the Senate Health Committee to vote against AB1X1. Some of these comments have been quoted in various “political rags.” The Legislative Analyst’s financial report and the answers Liz Hill and her staff gave to the many questions asked by the members of the Senate Health

Committee raised a number of questions about the financial viability of AB 1X1 within four or five years.

I watched the difficulty some of the Health Committee Senators had voting no or abstaining from any vote during the hearing on Monday, the 28th of January. Only one member of the Senate Health Committee, Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas voted in favor of the bill.

Is this the end of healthcare reform? I do not believe so. Despite some of our financial difficulties, I believe there will be legislation enacted to ensure that more children are enrolled in an appropriate healthcare program such as Healthy Families. Such bills were introduced last year and those bills are still viable. Stay turned, I don't believe healthcare will be on the back burner.

THE BUDGET--A FISCAL EMERGENCY & ANOTHER SPECIAL SESSION

On January 10th, the Governor submitted his 2008-09 budget proposal to the legislature. In addition, he declared a fiscal emergency and called a special session of the legislature to address the current year (2007-08) \$3.3 billion budget gap. The Governor directed all state departments to take a 10 percent cut across the board to be implemented as soon as possible. This effort is to stem the expected \$14.5 deficit that will occur by the end of the 2008-09 budget year if significant changes are not made.

The legislature began its fiscal emergency budget committee hearings a week ago. The administrative agencies/departments were questioned about their plans to meet the Governor's 10 percent cuts and the impact of those cuts, many of them substantial. It remains to be seen whether or not these cuts will be implemented in time this year to have any substantial effect on the overall deficit for the coming year.

TOMORROW'S ELECTION

This election has certainly put California on the map. When the Presidential Primary was moved to February 5, many were not happy about the change from the usual June Primary. However, it is clear that California has been more than a funding mechanism for those running for the Presidency. All the major candidates on both sides of the aisle have been to our State more than once!

Some preliminary information indicates that the voters have made up their minds about several of the more controversial propositions on the ballot. Polling results from yesterday indicate that Proposition 93, term limits appears to be losing

strength, and the voting on Propositions 94 through 97 seems to look more favorable. However, it is not over until it's over and that is when all the votes are counted. Polling is certainly not an exact science as we have seen in the past.

Once the rhetoric is over and the votes are in, I will send another Tidbits.