



Tidbits from Sacramento

Griffin & Associates
Legislative and Governmental Advocacy

1121 L Street, Suite 210 • Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 448-9275 • www.mjgriffin.com

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THE BUDGET – WHAT HAPPENED???

This was the year the budget was projected to be on time – so what happened??? So far nothing!! We are still waiting for some action, any action. As I was told several times during the past week, nothing is going on and no one seems to know just when the Conference Committee will schedule the next hearing.

The Conference Committee began its work in early June. They made numerous decisions and for the last 2 weeks, there has been only silence. Those of us that have watched the budget dance for many years, were aware that the tough decisions to close the budget gap would probably be negotiated by the Governor and the leadership of both houses and both parties (known as the “big 5 meetings”). However, there does not appear that any discussions have as yet taken place.

The deadline for the '07-'08 budget has passed. The “pain” for missing the July 1 new fiscal year will be felt by those entities that depend on state payments if the State Controller can not issue checks for July 15 payments. One of first healthcare entities to feel that pain is usually the long term care industry. Perhaps the coming week will result in the, resolution of the budget impasse and allow California to move forward.

LEGISLATION

The Legislature has been steadily moving forward, either passing bills or derailing them. Many bills are being amended in their policy committees in order to get the required votes. Among the key bills are the following:

AB 1 (Laird) – Set for Senate Health - 7/11 – Expect it to be passed. This is the “fall-back” bill should healthcare reform proposals all fall by the wayside. This would expand Medi-Cal and Healthy Families programs to cover all children below 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL). – SB 32 (Steinberg) is a duplicate of this bill.

AB 8 (Nunez/Perata) – Set for Senate Health-7/11 This is the Dems bill for healthcare reform. The June 24th Tidbits identified the various components of the bill. This bill will be the negotiating vehicle for the Dems in any discussions with the Reps and the Governor.

AB 16 (Hernandez) – In Senate Health –No hearing date yet. One of 3 bills (SB 676 Ridley-Thomas and SB 533 Yee) related to mandated immunizations for school entry. There was supposed to be a meeting to resolve differences between the bills, but apparently that has not yet happened.

AB 106 (Berg) – Sent to the Suspense File in the Senate Appropriation. The Chair has indicated he will release the bill when the “suspense file” is heard. They do not have a rule to allow bills that have a general fund cost, but also have a significant cost-savings to be passed without going to Suspense.

AB 1521 – (Salas) – In Senate Health- 7/11. Puts extensive requirements on bottled water and includes some on vended water.

AB 1554 (Jones) – In Senate Health -7/11 – Requires health plans and insurance companies to receive approvals from DMHC or DOI to increase premiums, co-pays, co-insurance and deductibles.

SB 210 (Kehoe) – Asm. Transp. 7/09 – Requires Air Resources Brd. to enforce a low-carbon fuel standard by 2010

SB 220 (Corbett) – Asm. Approps. – Not set. Puts a number of requirements on the bottled water industry. Increased fees on the vended water industry for more inspections.

SB 366 (Aanestad) – Removes a sunset clause to allow new technologies to continue to be used in California pursuant to CLIA standards.

SB 840 (Kuehl) – Asm. Approps – Not set – Passed the Asm. Health Cmte on July 3. This is the single-payer bill that Senator Kuehl has presented the last few years with some variation.

SB 966 (Simitian) – Asm. Approps. – Not set. Requires drug stores to have a system for the acceptance & collection of drugs for proper disposal.

POLITICS IN CALIFORNIA – REDISTRICTING & TERM LIMITS

The public appears to be well aware of the issue of “term limits” and have strong opinions on this issue. In addition, various polls in recent years have indicated that the public has become more aware of how the process of setting up Assembly & Senate Districts was done following the last census. Legislators are well aware of how the public views changing term limits and their general dissatisfaction with the entire process.

During the last couple of years, two legislators, Senator Roy Ashburn(R) and Senator Alan Lowenthal (D) have attempted to make changes to both processes, including a joint bill to change the redistricting process – the attempts failed. Both legislators appeared a few weeks ago before the members of the Institute for Governmental Advocates (IGA), the professional lobbyists association. It was a very insightful presentation and dialogue following was most interesting. Neither legislator has been derailed by the outcomes thus far. Instead, they both have legislation they are moving this year, as follows:

SCA 9 (Ashburn & Perata) – This Senate Constitutional Amendment would address both redistricting and a change in the term limits. Under this SCA, the next redistricting would be done by a committee composed of 55 retired judges and 11 members of the legislature. Term limits would be extended to allow a member to serve not more than 12 consecutive years in either the Senate or Assembly.

Assembly Member Maze is a co-author. Passed the Senate on a 29 to 5 vote. In the Assembly, but not yet assigned to a committee.

SCA 10 (Lowenthal) – This Senate Constitutional Amendment only addresses redistricting. This Committee would consist of 55 retired judges also, but would select 11 members from among the Assembly, Senate and the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC). Passed the Senate on a 34-2 vote. In the Assembly, but not yet assigned to a committee.

In addition, the Assembly also has put forth two measures that address only redistricting.

ACA 1 (Price & Nunez) – This Assembly Dem Assembly Constitutional Amendment is in the Assembly Appropriation Committee, but not yet set for hearing. ACA 1 would allow the Little Hoover Commission to be hired to redraw the Senate, Assembly, Congressional and State Board of Equalization district lines.

ACA 4 (Villines) - This is the Assembly Rep version of redistricting. It is also in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, but not yet set for hearing. ACA 4 would establish the Independent Citizens’ Commission to redraw the Senate, Assembly, Congressional and State Board of Equalization district lines.

If these Constitutional Amendments are passed they would be sent to the voters for approval. Whether or not these measures are passed, will be determined in the next few months. There is a strong move to ensure that these measures are put on the February ballot.

In addition to these Constitutional Amendments, there are currently 3 citizen initiatives that also address the redistricting . These initiatives are in circulation and if they attain the required number of signatures, (649,354) they will qualify for the February 5, 2008 ballot.

PROFILE – CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE – DEBRA BOWEN

In November, 2006, Debra Bowen was elected Secretary of State and became only the 6th woman in California history to be elected to a constitutional office. Secretary Bowen took office in January, 2007 as our 30th Secretary of State. Bowen graduated from Michigan State University in 1976 and received her law degree from the University of Virginia.

Bowen served in the California Assembly from 1992 through 1998, representing the 53rd Assembly District. She was elected to the Senate in 1998 and served until she was termed out in 2006. During her tenure in the legislature, Bowen chaired the Senate Elections, reapportionment and Constitutional Amendments Committee, the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee, and the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. Bowen authored a number of election-related laws and had a strong interest in bringing electronics into all aspects of the election process. In 1993 she authored the first law to put all of California's legislative information online, giving the public access to information about legislative bills, committee analyses and legislators votes.

As Secretary of State, Bowen is the Chief Elections Officer of California. Among her other key roles is providing the public with access to a wide range of information related to campaign finance, lobbying, election records, and federal, state and local government officials.

The business community also utilizes the services of the Secretary of State. Articles of Incorporation are approved by the Secretary, trademarks, trade names, service marks and fictitious business names are registered by the Secretary of State. This office also provides access to the California Business Portal, a website that easily connects people with electronic versions of important business documents and handbooks. The Secretary also appoints and commissions notaries public and oaths of office for non-civil service officers and employees and administers the Victims of Corporate Fraud Compensation Fund. This office is also the custodian of the state Constitution, the state archives and the Great Seal of California.