

Sacramento Safari 2010

Notes from our speakers

Alison ApRoberts, CAPTA Communications Manager

Note taker: Gisela Meier

Alison talked about how PTA members can connect with the media.

- Print media still rules the world; blogs get their information from newspapers.
- News outlets are hungry for information. They like personal local stories, trends and numbers.
- Call newspaper reporters or editors, preferably early in the week, after 10 a.m. and before 4 p.m.
- If the newspaper gets it wrong, call right away and ask for a correction.
- If you send information via email, call five minutes later. Let them know what you have sent and leave a number where you can be reached.
- If a reporter calls you for comments on a story, ask if you can call back in 10 minutes. Think, research and rehearse what you will say. Tell them what you want them to know even if they don't ask.
- "No comment" implies guilt. Better responses are: "I'm not prepared to answer that, but I'd like to focus on..." or "I think I've covered what I can on that subject." or "We don't have a position on that."
- Point out that you speak for a lot of people and that you are not paid for what you do.
- If you send pictures of people, use small groups of about three, pay attention to the background, and email it in a high resolution format.

Jo Loss, CAPTA President

Note taker: Gisela Meier

Jo talked about how to represent PTA when you are speaking to legislators.

- They are scared of you; you have made an effort that most constituents do not.
- We are volunteers and passionate believers in PTA's mission, so ban the phrase "Just a parent..."
- Understand what you are talking about. Give them specific facts and anecdotes from their legislative district.
- The ask: tell them what you want them to do. Agree to future conversations.
- Make sure the office staff has a higher awareness of your issues.

Jo also talked about the future of PTA. In 1960, there were 12 million members nationally; now there are 5 million. California PTA has dropped from 1.5 million to under a million members. CAPTA needs to look at how it is doing business, who the members are and what they need.

Debbie Look, CAPTA Director of Legislation
Note taker: Gisela Meier

- The state education budget has been cut by \$17 billion in the last two years. The Governor is proposing additional cuts of \$2.4 billion this year.
- The message we need to carry to lawmakers: You are not just cutting children's education, you are cutting the future of our state and our society. Increasing education funding will reduce expenditures for welfare and prisons.
- We can't wait. Our kids get only one chance at first grade. Budget cuts impact children at lower socio-economic levels more severely. We can't race to the top if we sink to the bottom in funding.

California State PTA is taking a three-pronged approach in its current advocacy:

- An action plan has been developed to oppose the Governor's proposed 2010-11 budget cuts, and to build public support for education. We have 9 million reasons to speak out. The majority of taxpayers do not have children in schools; we need to inform them about the problems. Offer to speak at Rotary Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, school board meetings, etc.
- State PTA supports the "Local Control of Local Classrooms Funding Act," an initiative that would lower the threshold for passage of local school funding measures from 2/3 to 55 percent. State PTA urges all PTA members to participate in gathering signatures before the mid-April deadline to qualify the measure for the ballot. Recent surveys show that 60% of voters support the idea, 75% say schools need more money, and 80% support more local control.
- State PTA joined the California School Boards Association and the Association of California School Administrators in a lawsuit against the State of California, arguing that the existing state funding mechanism for education is fundamentally unconstitutional. Plaintiffs will include students, parents and schools. No PTA funds will be used; the attorneys are donating their services. If the suit is successful, the court would direct the legislature and governor to develop a better funding system for education.

"People who label things like art, music, after-school programs as 'frills' really don't get the system."

"We're cutting not just our student's future, but our state's future as well."

"We're potentially losing an entire generation of children through this short-sighted cutting."

"98,900 children will be losing health care in Orange County alone, if the Governor cuts Healthy Families & CalWORKS."

California Secretary of State Debra Bowen

Note Taker: Kathleen Fay

Secretary Bowen discussed her trip to Munich last week for a conference concerning military and overseas voters. Contrary to a popular rumor, the ballots of these voters do count, even if election results can be fairly well determined by early poll results.

Of the various duties for which her office is responsible, elections (mostly counting votes) take up the most time, although with just a small portion of employees (fewer than 30). A larger portion of Secretary Bowen's staff addresses business entity issues, application of the Uniform Commercial Code (a document she insists makes interesting reading), notaries, and authentications.

The Secretary of State is also responsible for maintaining the state's archives. She urged the PTA audience to go visit the California Museum for History, Women & the Arts to see what has been accomplished, and noted that members of the Hall of Fame are mostly from California's public schools.

Secretary Bowen discussed a broad array of election issues and interesting facts:

- California typically does not have long lines at the polls, but if voters are in line at 8:00 p.m. on election day, they can still vote.
- California now offers no-fault voting by mail – formerly known as “absentee voting” – to make it easier for voters to participate in elections. The program is now called “Vote by Mail.”
- Sonoma County has the highest voter participation rate.
- Only about $\frac{3}{4}$ of those qualified to vote are registered to vote.
- New national data recently revealed that “snowbirds” (people who split their time between warmer and colder climates) had been voting in two states for several years, although it is illegal for a voter to be registered at more than one address.
- The Secretary's office wishes they had more information about voters. Fortunately, a new voter registration system, anticipated to be ready in 2011, will be able to check voter rolls across state lines.
- Under the new voter registration system, citizens will be able to use their California ID card or driver's license to complete voter registration online, rather than having to print, sign, and mail in the final form. The new system will use the California ID/driver's license signature as the signature for voter registration.
- “Deadwood” on the state's voter rolls (including voters that are no longer valid) currently makes voter turnout seem lower than it actually is.
- Secretary Bowen conducted a top-to-bottom review of current voter systems, contracting with the University of California to accomplish this. Most systems now in use are proprietary software systems. This represents a problem, because the systems are not open to public scrutiny. Disclosure issues to be addressed to resolve this include (1) the matter of trade secrets; and (2) finding a way to increase transparency without giving hackers access to critical information.
- Her review found several security issues. The informal policy of “security by obscurity”, for example, means that if one person gets access, the code may become available to many – as happened when a Washington grandmother found online access to the code. In another case, one voter machine was actually stolen, and then later found for sale on eBay. Her study also discovered that voter machines could be tampered with either by opening the machines at the hinges while keeping the security seals intact, or by using a common hotel

mini-bar key to gain access to any machine. Additionally, she found that it is easy to load software with a memory card or stick to load a virus to the machine, which could then be used to transfer the virus to the general voter system.

- Solutions to these problems included making changes to the physical systems and eliminating touch-screen machines entirely (which had the possibility of showing one thing while recording another). One significant obstacle to finding easy solutions is simply that voting is secret, which eliminates the possibility of creating redundancies to check systems. While most systems are audited, voting results are not audited. An error rate of 3% in banking, for instance is acceptable – but not in voting! The most practical solution is a return to an optical scanning system.
- Internet voting has often been suggested, but what if the system crashes? A risk-based strategy is needed.
- They are now beginning to build a science-based model for how the voting system works.
- From one to three people now work on voter education and outreach.
- They ran a high school mock election recently, in order to increase high school voter registration by making students more comfortable with the process, and increase participation.
- The average age of California poll workers is 77 years old. The state needs to attract high school students to participate in the election process.
- Email reminders of voter registration deadlines may be useful.
- For hard-to-reach communities (a sizable Cambodian population in Long Beach, for example), they partner with community resources.
- 501(c)(3) organizations can assist with outreach efforts.
- Secretary Bowen began her government involvement through a local Neighborhood Watch program. She takes seriously her role to inspire girls to participate in community service and leadership.

Secretary Bowen answered questions from the audience after her prepared remarks:

- To ensure that only legal voters participate in elections, the California driver's license or social security numbers provide a link that easily determines citizenship 90% of the time. She noted that historically, illegal voters are not a problem; the biggest problem concerns those who are *almost*, but not quite, 18 years old.
- "Motor-voter" registration enables voter registration in conjunction with the DMV. New ideas are welcome. The Secretary's office has also worked with *Declare Yourself, Rock the Vote*, and other non-profit groups to encourage voter participation, and is open to other partnerships and collaborations.
- Counting of absentee ballots begins five days before elections, but results are not announced before the election. Provisional ballots are counted later. Military ballots are counted as long as they are postmarked on time. Their office can be counting ballots up to 30 days post-election.
- "I got fascinated with the beautiful, logical consistency of the commercial code." (her reason for going to law school)
- Contact: secretary.bowen@sos.ca.gov. Toll-free voter registration hotline: (800) 345-VOTE.

California Budget Project Executive Director Jean Ross

Note Taker: Kathleen Fay

A frequent Sacramento Safari speaker, Jean Ross opened her comments by noting that she always seems to come to deliver bad news about the state budget. Yet in this case, she emphasized that it is truly hard to overstate the magnitude of California's budget problems.

In dollar terms, the current problem is smaller than before, but percentage-wise, it is a greater problem. The state has been delaying costs and trimming back – as they have been doing for years, yet there is still a budget gap of \$19 billion – an amount equivalent to all funds spent on higher education and corrections put together!

The California budget has already been deeply cut, and this year is \$20 billion lower than it was two years ago. Most “red light” work has been found by now, as has the “dim light” waste, too. There are no easy solutions left; California must either (a) cut back spending, or (b) increase revenues – that choice represents the current budget challenge.

Why have there been no good years since 2001? Because of borrowing and accounting tricks used to cover previous shortfalls. Borrowing may be a current option, but there is no way to pay back the money – plus interest. There is now \$2 billion in current debt service costs alone. Additionally, the state has just been through the biggest economic downfall since the Great Depression:

- 1.3 million jobs lost
- Over 12% unemployment
- No income means no income taxes
- Reduced buying means less received in sales taxes
- Little real estate turnover means reduced revenues
- Increased use of public assistance and governmental programs has increased costs to the state
- People who used to be economic contributors are now looking for assistance
- Tough year last year makes it hard to balance the budget

Solutions being considered include further cuts, increasing revenues (taxes), borrowing, and accounting maneuvers. The state had hoped to receive \$6.9 billion in federal dollars, but the President's budget only includes half that amount.

Plans are to cut \$2.4 billion from California's public schools. (“How can it be said that the state will both fully fund education AND cut the education budget?”)

One maneuver involved utilizing the transportation budget to make adjustments, by moving transportation dollars over to help balance the budget, thus lowering the Prop 98 guarantee by \$1 billion [the “gas tax swap”]. Another option involves combining deep cuts to state employee compensation with deep reductions to both Corrections and Health & Human Services (eliminating cash assistance programs, and state health coverage for low-income families/children). The governor vetoed several parts of these early budget maneuvers.

The good news is that revenues are now looking up, with \$1 billion more than earlier forecasts. However, an “April surprise” of significantly more money coming in than expected is unlikely.

The state is now beginning its budget season in earnest. Committees are trying to flesh out various proposals. There are still tough decisions to be made, which will have to look at a three-legged stool:

- Prudent spending cuts
- Additional revenues
- Additional federal aid

...or else painful reductions will have to be made that will harm children and lead to worker layoffs.

There are 16,000 fewer teachers this year, many of whom probably won't return to teaching. This represents a lasting impact on education.

PTA remains an important voice in Sacramento concerning education and matters pertaining to the well-being of children and families.

Ms. Ross answered questions from the audience after her prepared remarks:

- If the state's economy double-dips, increased federal aid will be needed. The federal government can deficit-spend to help with economic recovery, while the state cannot. Deep cuts will put the overall economy at risk.
- PTA presence helps legislators to vote in favor of children by being one of the few non-partisan groups providing input; PTA is able to go in and talk to people who haven't always suggested a balanced approach to balancing the budget by reminding the legislators that “PTA IS your local community – your constituents.”
- There is a 3% reserve for school districts but not for the state. Only the governor can withhold transfer to reserves in tough times. And right now, it IS a rainy day, with a multi-year budget crisis. (Taxpayers may not like dollars sitting in state coffers rather than in their own bank accounts, if there were a large rainy-day fund.)
- PTA should be meeting with their federal representatives, too. Without further help, classes will only get bigger, the situation will only get worse.

“I'm sort of wondering: what did I do to become a charter member of the Bad NEWS Bears club?”

“It's hard to understate how bad the budget crisis is.”

“The impact of the downturn is hard to overstate. Many people are now members of the ‘I never thought I'd be here’ club of needing public assistance.”

“It's not a Perfect Storm because there's nothing good about it.”

“You have a Rainy Day Fund for rainy days & we are in a torrential downpour”

Contact: jross@cbp.org ; www.cbp.org

Dan Walters, Columnist, *Sacramento Bee*
Note Taker: Celia Jaffe

Quotes:

The current budget crisis "was a train wreck that any fool could see was coming" and "was born of political expediency."

"This [budget crisis] isn't going to go away. This is reality. Reality bites."

"California is functionally insolvent."

"The more you paper it [the budget crisis] over with all these gimmicks, the worse the day of reckoning will be and the day of reckoning is coming."

"Anyone running for governor of California ought to have a psychiatric evaluation."

In response to a question about running for office himself: "Would an entomologist want to be a bug?"

California Budget Crisis

Causes

- Overspending, including on education, with one-time windfall income.
- State income that is "boom & bust" because of very progressive tax structure; expenditures that are increasingly fixed.
- Fundamental problem: a disparate California populace not able to arrive at unified policy decisions

How Bad is It?

- Previous structural deficit of the general fund was 5-10%, but the current deficit is 15- 20%
- Lowest new car sales since 1975; new car sales in an economic indicator.
- Unemployment is actually higher than official 12% figure, effectively almost 20%

Prospects for an Improving Economy

- California has been a boom/bust economy for 2 decades (defense, dot-com, housing), but there is no guarantee of another boom
- Need of 250,000-300,00 new jobs a year just to stay at current employment rate

Education

- Last July's agreement for the \$11 billion repayment to Prop 98 doesn't create the money
- Prop 98 counts on the next economic boom, which is not guaranteed
- Education spending may be down permanently at this level

Reform Possibilities

Taxation Reform

- We have structural problems with taxation--reliance on high income taxpayers makes state revenue unstable
- Current taxation system is inane--e.g. hot food being taxable and cold food not taxable, San Francisco 60% of local property tax stays in city/county, whereas only 9% for Orange County
- Stupid not to tax services, particularly with the blurred line between products and services, like software engineering
- Relying on property tax is anachronistic; parcel taxes are inherently unfair because of uniform amount no matter the property size
- Best is probably income tax, less progressive than current rates

Government Reform

- Tweaks won't work--need to throw out the whole system, perhaps parliamentary system.
- Current system is best for passing the buck--no one responsible.
- "Go-go" (good government) reforms, like those presented by California Forward won't be enough.
- We suffer from unintended consequences of previous actions, like Prop 13, Prop 98, and law on redevelopment agency funding.

Miscellaneous

- CTA is most influential lobby, and like all interest groups is more effective at stopping something than making something happen
- California's upcoming population increase comes from high birth rate; illegal immigrant population is proportionately not that huge a fiscal drain
- Comparison of corrections costs between California and Texas. California almost twice the cost because of higher paid guards and court-ordered inmate health care costs.

"The take-home message is that when you lock down part of the budget, you end up with unintended consequences."

"The problem with Prop 98 is the assumption that there will always be money there."

"Our revenue system is inelastic & that won't change."

"Where's all the extra population coming from? Babies. 575 thousand of them per year. More than 1 per minute."

"I don't want to be a politician. I think they're weird people. I mean, would an etymologist want to be a bug? Would a proctologist want to be a...?"

"We work in the negative. It's easier to stop things from happening than to make something happen."

"How do we prepare our kids for the high tech, biotech future? Don't know...I'm a journalist, not an educator."

Speaker Notes: Rick Miller, California Department of Education

Note Taker: Celia Jaffe

Race to the Top (RTTT)

Reflects Obama administration goals:

- increased achievement & closing the achievement gap
- reduce drop-out rate
- more students going to college & graduating (Public Policy Institute of California predicts huge gap between number of college grads and demand for them in 25 years)

Standards & Assessment

- Currently 50 different sets of standards across the country

- Feds want common national standards
 - developed from the bottom up by the states
 - fewer, clearer, higher standards (higher is not a Calif issue)
- Need for more meaningful assessment and multiple measures of learning

Data System

- Now creating system to track student progress from year to year (longitudinal growth)
- Need to follow beyond high school to see long term effectiveness of policies
- Calif. Dept. of Ed. collects and reports data, but local districts do the interpretation.
- Need for professional development to increase effective use of student data
- CALPADS (new student data system) had rocky start but will be up soon
- CALTIDES (teacher data system) will be coming soon

Quality teachers & administrators

- Feds looking for improved, meaningful employee evaluation system
- Evaluations as part of employment accountability
- If you're an effective teacher, you can be rewarded and you can be asked to mentor others.

Low performing schools

- Persistently low performing schools must use one of four models of intervention, per RTTT.

California's application for RTTT

- Asked for \$80 million
- Not successful in the first round, waiting to get feedback on why. Feds wanted specifics.
- Concern that districts didn't sign MOU and then determine a work plan later when funding was clear.

Reponses to Questions

- Q: Was there an East Coast bias on RTTT applications? A: Yes, it seems so. New York's successful application was much less complete.
- Q: Who is going to negotiate new evaluations, etc. with teacher unions? A: CTA was at the table for creating the state RTTT application, but local associations still do negotiations. 25% of MOUs from local districts were signed by union heads.
- Q: Why do we lay off young, energetic teachers? A: There is currently a lawsuit testing the constitutionality of tenure. Teachers need to be highly qualified under NCLB. It is a problem when instead of keeping an effective faculty team together, some high-risk schools have 100% staff turnover in a year.
- Q: What about assessment at beginning and at end of year to show progress? A: Two tests in a year would be expensive & time consuming. Core of RTTT is looking for individual longitudinal growth, but Calif current system looks at group growth. We need several years of data to anticipate reasonable growth expectations for an individual student.

- Q: What would be a reasonable amount of compensation for teachers? Would teachers be compensated for maintaining a high level of learning? A: I don't have an answer to this (other than to say more than they make now) and frankly it's not critical for the state to try and answer this question. This is now, and would continue to be, a local decision. What the state is interested in, through RTTT, is to ensure that the mechanism by which we determine "a high level of learning" is of high quality.
- Q: In some school districts, parents are motivated to enroll their children in private tutoring. How could you control such variables while you evaluate teachers? A: Again, that is a local decision. It's a particularly good question though and one for which we have to be particularly cognizant. That is why whatever system we create must include multiple measures. That way we help to ensure that the evaluation system in total is a fair representation of an individual teacher or principal's unique efforts.
- Q: How much money was spent on applying for RTTT funds in Calif? A: Hard to say. We received about \$200k in grants from the Hewlett and Irvine Foundations. WestEd and AIR donated a significant amount of in-kind time to the project. And I'm not sure how exactly to account for my time, Kathy Gaither's and the rest of the team – but it was significant.

"There's a 1 million person gap between those with a college degree & a job that requires a college degree – more requiring than those that have them."

"We need better evaluation that's not perfunctory – it needs to be meaningful in the classroom."

"In the next 3-5 months, seniority will be the issue & conversation – especially in the highest poverty schools where there is 100% turnover in some cases."

Kevin Gordon – President, School Innovations & Advocacy

Note Taker: Kim Anderson

There are some critical issues facing the education community:

- Education has already taken a disproportionate share of cuts - \$17 billion over the last two years.
- Cuts to education somehow seem to stick when proposed cuts to other areas don't.
- The Prop 98 amount is all over the place. If we did something called "Certification" – where the Controller and SPI fix into law what the Prop 98 base - that would be better.
- The Governor is proposing deep cuts to education, largely ignoring the July budget agreement. K-12 revenues would be *\$5.4 billion higher* if the July budget agreement were adhered to.
- The state has a \$20 billion deficit, so it's possible that if the July education agreement remains, that we may hear talk of a Prop 98 suspension.

- Even though Governor proposed making cuts in administration, most school districts have already done that. California has one of the lowest administrator to student ratios in the country.
- Governor is a champion of local control – he feels that school districts should have 100% local control.

There are two major impediments to making the proposed cuts to education:

1. The Prop 98 guarantee and getting legislators to go along with a \$2.4 billion cut.
2. The Maintenance of Effort (MOE) issue. The federal government based the ARRA funding on requiring states to fund education at least at the 2005-06 education spending levels and now the Governor is seeking a waiver. That would make California out of compliance and therefore ineligible for the second round of Race To The Top (RTTT) funding as well as State Fiscal & Stabilization Fund (SFSF).

Budget outlook:

1. If the legislature is convinced that ignoring the MOE will jeopardize federal dollars they will put those dollars back into education. Kevin believes that due to the Prop 98 requirement & the MOE, it is unlikely that the cuts to education will be any worse than they are now.
2. State revenues are currently increasing – they are outpacing financial projections. Therefore, the next budget occurrence will probably be the May Revise and there is likely to be no final budget agreement until well into the fall.
3. The legislature passed a version of the gas tax swap which holds education harmless.

Message from PTA should be:

- Education has already been cut too much.
- This *disinvestment* in education will have a high price for our children.
- Schools over the next 15 -20 years will be vastly different because of the cuts they have already sustained.
- Make sure that when the economy improves in 2014-15 and education funding gets better that money goes to new programs and/or reform rather than the bargaining table.

Closing thoughts:

- It will take a long time for schools to get things back to where they were.
- Need to look carefully at mandates – some are necessary for schools to function well.
- School districts are going to be considering some very serious options: layoffs, letting go of Class Size Reduction, shortening the school year.
- It is time to take another look at Prop 98. Schools need the same kind of protection that Prop 1A gives to cities & local governments.

“One of the things that is unique about your group is that you’re hearing from a cross-section of folks – many of which have different agendas.”

(Regarding legislators) “Hold them accountable for votes they’ve made prior or in the past.”

“MOE – it’s not one of the 3 Stooges, its Maintenance of Effort-- money due back to education that they’ve cut”

(Regarding discussion about suspension of Prop 98) “We’re eroding the space that sets the stage for teaching & learning. I just told a Superintendent/Principal – ‘well, I guess your going to have to lose that leg because we have cut administration as much as we can!”

“I don’t think we’ll get a budget until well into the fall because of the polarization. Two Republican leaders, who ‘compromised’ [last session], lost their jobs as leaders as a result.”

“The Governor’s office is saying that Education groups are jeopardizing money to CA by opposing the waiver. Hey, wait a second, it’s like you’re the crook who just robbed the bank & you’re offering me my money back if I don’t call the police?”

Paul Navarro, Deputy Legislative Secretary to Gov. Schwarzenegger
Note Taker: Gisela Meier

- The Governor has only a few months left in office, but he is still working hard. The Governor’s January proposal includes making some significant changes to teacher seniority. We are at risk of losing a whole generation of new young teachers who are willing to work in schools where the older teachers are not. The proposed changes would allow school districts to make staffing decisions based on what is best for children.
- A second step is to pay teachers better for tough assignments. School districts should have the flexibility to make local decisions.
- Paul encouraged strong leadership in the Capitol. A phrase he dislikes is ‘It’s tough because it’s an election year.’ He encouraged leaders and legislators to do what is right and true always, not just in election years.
- Navarro believes that there should be a healthy balance between state and local control. Governance shifted to the state as a result of Prop. 13. We have been trying for 10 years to send it back to the local level.
- Asked about waste and abuse in school districts, Navarro said that a lot of school districts still pay step and column increases, while everyone in the state government has taken a 15% decrease in pay. “Every other industry can renegotiate contracts. Senior teachers do not want to renegotiate their contracts.”
- On government reform: California has the most polarized legislature out of the 50 states, partly because the society is so diverse. Navarro feels that a constitutional convention is unlikely. He would like to see a six-member assembly and six-member senate, representing six areas of California. Then they would have to think about the entire state and might be able to come to an agreement.
- On public campaign financing: “As long as there are creative minds in the world, there will be creative ways to get around campaign financing laws. If you have the right smarts, the little guy can still win.”

“Here we are, at the end (referring to the end of the Governor’s term). I had my tray table in the upright position, ready to descend, but he still wants to do stuff.”

“We need to tackle seniority. Labor sometimes protects the adult to the detriment of the child.”

“The phrase I hate the most is ‘that’ll be tough (to pass) – it’s an election year’ that, to me, speaks to the hypocrisy of government.”

(Regarding local control) “Don’t let us, up here, make those decisions for you.”

“The policy/governance side of local control was shifted to us [Sacramento] with Prop 13 & I think that’s where things started to go south.”

“For better or worse, we govern by ‘one size fits all’ because we have to.”

“Why would any district provide a step & column increase when there are such deep budget cuts going on?”

“Every budget is based on assumptions – we’re not circumventing our constitutional responsibility – we’ve got \$80-90 billion in expenses!”

Rick Simpson, Deputy Chief of Staff to Assembly Speaker John Perez
Note Taker: Gisela Meier

Tips on advocacy—THE 5 P’s:

- **PROCESS:** We have deadlines, rules, procedures and hoops. The more you understand the process, the more effective you can be. That means understanding the legislative calendar and who makes decisions when. You should be knowledgeable about your subject and the arguments on the other side, so you can respond.
- **POLITICS:** Keep political alliances in mind. Republicans generally align with Chambers of Commerce and the California Taxpayers Association; Democrats align with trial lawyers, environmentalists and labor unions. Lawmakers tend to vote with their party in the initial vote on a bill, presuming that problems will be cleaned up later. So it is easier to influence the process when the bill goes to the second house.
- **PERSONAL:** The legislators are as diverse as California; they bring differing viewpoints, and personal life experiences, to the process. Knowing the legislator’s background can be helpful.
- **PERSISTENT AND PATIENT:** Persistence and patience are needed. It may take several legislative sessions and multiple years to achieve success.
- **POLITENESS:** Don’t forget to thank legislators when they vote as you asked.

The top priorities of the new Assembly Speaker:

1. Jobs – the budget situation won’t turn around without more jobs.
2. A “Fox News Budget” – i.e. a budget that is fair and balanced. The current proposed budget is a “total train wreck” that decimates schools and social services.
3. Reform – legislative and constitutional changes are needed to eliminate the obstructions that keep the state from doing its business. California Forward has asked the Speaker to put their package on the ballot. A first hearing was held the day prior. The reforms provide an appropriate balance, with items that both the right and the left like and dislike, Simpson believes.

Race to the Top:

- California didn't make the first cut. The legislature is waiting to see what additional legislation the Governor will propose for the second round. This time the legislature may be more skeptical about participating, depending on the changes that would be required. Costs to fund the changes may exceed the one-time Race to the Top funding.
- California is taking a new look at state standards, which are "a mile wide and an inch deep." The 50 governors are developing national standards that would emphasize quality, not quantity.

Other topics:

- Perez does not like the "Big 5" process (Governor negotiating with both party leaders from each house). It tends to shut out the public and pits three Republicans (Governor and two leaders) against two Democrats. Perez wants to move the process back to the public arena and get more public feedback.
- More local control is needed. There is a disconnect between local responsibility and state authority. Simpson thinks local taxing power should be reinstated, but he doesn't agree with the parcel tax initiative because school boards should have the power to raise taxes. ("This is a republic, not a democracy. We elect people to make decisions.")

"This is a very human process [governance]"

"[The legislature] is a body that is as diverse as CA."

"The Speaker is trying to come up with a Fox News Budget: fair'n'balanced."

"The national rap on CA's standards is that they are a mile wide & an inch deep – that we have confused quantity with quality."

"There are a lot of vestigial organs in state law."

"I don't think someone's 'no' vote should carry more weight than someone else's 'yes' vote."

"This is not a Democracy. This is a Republic."

Michael Cohen, California Deputy Legislative Analyst

Rachel Ehlers, LAO

Note Taker: Gisela Meier

- Budget problems will continue for several years.
- The legislature has received the Governor's budget proposal and has started passing bills, including a transportation bill that makes use of the gas tax more flexible.
- The cash situation is a little better than last year; revenues from income taxes are somewhat higher than expected at this point.
- The state has planned how it will pay its bills this year. This will include a 60- to 90-day deferment of \$2.5 billion in payments to school districts until April, when taxes receipts are complete.

- The legislature is waiting until May to take action on education funding. Waiting until after tax revenues are in makes it easier to determine Prop. 98 formulas for K-12. There is already a major controversy regarding the Prop. 98 maintenance factor, involving \$10 billion in potential education funding. If the economy improves, repayment of the maintenance factor could begin this year.
- Three key issues in the Governor's proposal regarding education funding:
 1. Flexibility for school districts – last year districts were given unprecedented flexibility in spending. The LAO supported that. This year the Governor wants to expand that flexibility, but he is proposing a 12% cut to district administrations. The LAO disagrees. Many districts have already cut administrations as far as possible. Districts should continue to have a choice in deciding how to deal with cuts.
 2. The Governor is proposing \$300 million in cuts by allowing districts to contract out for services. The LAO says situations vary among districts and such a specific reduction would not make sense in every case. The LAO recommends adding class size reduction to districts' budget flexibility.
 3. The LAO reviewed all 50 state mandates on school districts and decided most don't make sense. One example is that districts are required to mail a letter to the parent of a truant, and then must fill out paperwork for reimbursement. Each letter then costs \$17. The state has not been paying reimbursements for mandates and owes school districts \$3.6 billion. The Governor wants to suspend the mandates for one year, which would save \$375 million. (Report available at lao.ca.gov)
- The LAO last month produced two reports, one on Prop. 98 and one on K-12 education, including issues regarding teacher layoffs. Both reports are available on the website.
- Higher education: The governor has made the state university system his priority and has proposed a constitutional amendment to move money from the correctional system to the universities. The LAO says there is no connection between the two programs and has other proposals to bring down correctional costs. Higher education is at least \$300 million over-budgeted in the governor's proposal, which does not take increased student fees into account.

"This time the good news is that we've planned a way to not pay our bills on time as opposed to writing IOU's." Cohen.

"The Governor has made higher education his priority in Education." Cohen

"Part of knowing if we're doing our job right is asking 'well, have we made both sides angry this month?'" Cohen

"When it comes to what's best for children, I don't think Prop 98 is the best way to fund schools." Ehlers.

"Loss of local control was the most damaging part of Prop 13. It's hard to have a real conversation about Prop 13 because people are very sensitive about it." Ehlers

"We still think thematic block grants for categoricals are still a good idea." Ehlers

“Local control is a pretty complicated topic although we’d like to see more of it implemented.” Cohen

“An evaluative system rather than a seniority system is what we’d like to see things move toward but we’re not there yet.” Cohen

Assembly Member Julia Brownley

Note Taker: Gisela Meier

- California will find out mid-April why the state did not qualify as a finalist in the first round of Race to the Top funding. Legislators will have to decide whether to re-apply.
- Ms. Brownley has re-introduced AB8 (previously vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger), which would set up a working group to completely revise and simplify funding formulas for education, and set up a way to collect financial data on school funding. She doubts the governor will change his mind, but she is committed to school finance reform. “People don’t feel education dollars are spent wisely and efficiently, and there is no way to know.” If people knew how education dollars were spent, they would be willing to invest more.
- Ms. Brownley has introduced 13 bills, including one allowing foster children to remain in the same school as they are moved around, and another on green cleaning products for schools.

“[Education Reform] is an issue I am absolutely committed to.”

“Good schools make good communities.”

Danny Alvarez, Staff Director for the Senate Committee on Education

Note taker: Gisela Meier

What’s going on in Sacramento? “It’s the budget, all the time,” said Mr. Alvarez. The Governor is attempting a manipulation of Prop. 98 that does not keep education whole. State revenues are increasing. An extra \$4 - 5 billion will help, but it won’t solve a \$20 billion budget problem. Education accounts for 40 - 45 percent of the budget, so it will have to be part of the solution. Last year, the state gave school districts flexibility with parts of their budgets, but not class size reduction flexibility. Most categoricals were put in large blocks with no strings attached. This year, there are discussions about adding class size reduction and economic impact funds to the pot of undesignated funding.

Legislation to back up the Race to the Top application was passed by the legislature in January, but California did not make it into the final competition for RTTT grant funds. It is important to build on what passed, in areas such as teacher evaluations, teacher dismissal and reduction in workforce. In the next few months, we need to beef up the state’s application. The difficulty is that we won’t know until mid-April why we didn’t make the first cut. The legislature should move the ball forward and try to get as much money as possible.

“Sometimes we have to distinguish between what’s good for the business of districts and what’s good for parents & kids.”

“[Regarding ESEA reauthorization] whenever you move a ball forward like this, the status quo isn’t going to like it as much as you want.”

Richard Zeiger, Chief of Staff for Assembly Member Tom Torlakson

Note Taker: Kathleen Fay

According to his chief of staff, Richard Zeiger, Assemblyman Tom Torlakson is a very nice man. The assemblyman’s positions of education matters include the following:

- An emphasis on trying to restore quality and support of neighborhood schools. They are a value to society as a focal point for the community.
- Bring more resources to schools – a lot of what can’t be done is a result of diminishing resources.
- Not just math and language, but science, social studies, history, music, geography, and P.E. are important to an overall education.
- He supports bills to:
 - Set common standards for technology
 - Make it easier to alter/revise curriculum, keep it up-to-date
 - Restore school nurses in California

In response to a question about November’s election for a new Superintendent of Public Instruction, Mr. Zeiger understands that candidates will likely include Tom Torlakson, Gloria Romero, Larry Aceves, Diane Lenning, and a couple of others. The SPI oversees a \$40 billion operation, with 2000 employees. But it is the State Board of Education – upon appointment of the governor – who now has the most say over education policy.

The best way to establish local control over education dollars is to give localities ways to raise their own funds, so they can determine how the money is spent. He expects Republicans to resist lowering the local parcel tax threshold to 55%. He recommends funding for school nurses not come from Prop 98 money, but that they should be able to bill private insurance for treatment provided at school. He believes insurance companies will favor this change, because it should save them money by heading off visits to private doctors or the emergency room.

Teaching to the test equates to doing the wrong thing, the wrong way. The current emphasis on testing has warped the system – instead of measuring learning, it has become an end in itself. We need accountability, but other ways to measure learning. It’s cheap to test, but kids need a more well-rounded education, overall.

“The law of nature up here is that hard data drives out soft data.”

“[Referring to teaching to the test] not everything can be measured with a bubble test. LIFE is not a bubble test.”