

January 18, 2010

# The Big Squeeze



<b>Budget &amp; taxes</b>	<b>4</b>
First federal stimulus hasn't stimulated employment	
<b>Politics &amp; leadership</b>	<b>6</b>
Midterms could see record spending	
<b>Governors</b>	<b>8</b>
Govs want federal Medicaid bailout	
<b>Bird's eye view</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Hot issues</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Once around the statehouse lightly</b>	<b>13</b>

The next issue of Capitol Journal will be available on January 25th.

## Top Story

*Governors' annual State of the State addresses have primarily focused on closing yawning budget gaps. But election year politics are also coloring the gov's view of the world.*

## SNCJ Spotlight

### Governors address budgets — and re-election

Unsurprisingly, given the state of state economies, budget matters have figured prominently in all the state of the state addresses delivered so far this month. And this being an election year has colored much of what governors have had to say on the subject.

As *SNCJ* reported last week, NEW YORK Gov. David Paterson (D) took the opportunity in his address to blame lawmakers for spending the state into crisis, which he was through tolerating.



“No longer are we going to run New York like a payday loan operation,” he said, adding a few moments later: “You have left me and other governors no choice. Whether it be by vetoes or delayed spending, I will not write bad checks, and we will not mortgage our children’s future.”

The tough talk was undoubtedly directed in part at all of the critics — including President Obama — who have said Paterson, who’s approval rating is at an all-time low, should not run for re-election in November. After pitching his plans for creating high-tech green jobs and spurring economic development, Paterson seemed to link his own fate with that of the state.

“Some say that we will not succeed — that the story has already been written and the ending is ordained,” he said. “But story lines change, and people change.”

Another governor who came out stumping this month was ARIZONA’s Jan Brewer (R). In her State of the State message, she criticized President Obama and the Democrat-controlled Congress, and called for “substantial cuts in spending,” a rollback of Medicaid and — once the state’s fiscal situation has improved — a cap on future spending growth, all bound to go over well with her conservative base. Facing a crowded August gubernatorial primary, Brewer also toned down her ongoing call for a temporary sales tax hike, stating only “we must raise some additional revenue.” She went on to say, “there is no one here and no one elsewhere who has fought any longer or harder than I have for lower taxes, job growth and economic freedom in ARIZONA.”

Just three weeks ahead of his date with Democratic primary voters, ILLINOIS Gov. Pat Quinn delivered a State of the State address that provided fewer specifics about his plan to tackle an estimated \$13 billion budget shortfall than about the personal qualities that make him the right man to lead the state in the aftermath of Rod Blagojevich’s political implosion.

“In taking the oath of office, I knew that we had a state in crisis, a state that needed stabilization, that needed an honest governor and an honest government,” he said.

The speech included an emotional tribute to Quinn’s deceased father that had the distinct feel of a campaign commercial.

“He taught me always to work hard, treat people with dignity, don’t call people names, be honest and trustworthy,” he said. “That, to me, is what ILLINOIS is all about, our state, the Land of Lincoln. The people of our state, they’re the best of the best. We’re the pride of our nation. We can accomplish great things if we work together.”

## In the hopper

At any given time, State Net tracks tens of thousands of bills in all 50 states, the US Congress and the District of Columbia. Here’s a snapshot of what’s in the legislative works:

**Number of Prefiles last week:** 3,192

**Number of Intros last week:** 12,132

**Number of Enacted/Adopted last week:** 633

**Number of 2010 Session Prefiles to date:** 10,289

**Number of 2010 Intros to date:** 16,002

**Number of 2010 Session Enacted/Adopted overall to date:** 742

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(measures current as of 1/14/2010)  
Source: State Net database





Another outgoing governor, ALABAMA's Bob Riley (R), appeared to have his legacy in mind when he asserted in his State of the State message that ALABAMA wasn't in financial crisis. He said all of the "dire predictions" and "horror stories" about the state budget were "a crock" fabricated by those who want to expand gambling.

"I can't imagine anyone who thinks the best way to help our economy is to have Alabamians lose billions of dollars gambling," he said, reasserting a position he's maintained steadfastly in the waning years of his administration. After referencing a county whose residents lost \$2 billion a year to outside gambling interests, he said, "let's understand that any scheme that will legalize slot machines under the pretext of generating new revenue is the biggest hustle in Alabama's history."

It appears Riley may get his way, at least this year. Although House Majority Leader Ken Guin (D) said, "At the very least, the people of this state deserve the right to vote on the issue," the chamber's minority leader, Mike Hubbard (R), said: "I don't think they have the votes on gambling and I don't think they have the guts to shut down the session over it. I believe that we [Republicans] along with a coalition of Democrats can stop it."

(NEW YORK TIMES, ARIZONA REPUBLIC [PHOENIX], CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, STATELINE, SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS, MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER)

— Compiled by KOREY CLARK

## Upcoming elections

1/14/2010 - 2/4/2010

01/19/2010

**Massachusetts Special Election**  
US Senate (Edward Kennedy)

01/26/2010

**Florida Special Primary**  
House District 58

**Minnesota Special Election**  
Senate District 26

02/02/2010

**Florida Special Primary**  
US House (District 19)

**Georgia Special Runoff**  
Senate District 22

**Illinois Primary Election**

House (All)  
Senate 1,4,7,10,13,16,19,22,25,28,31, 34, 37, 40, 43,46,49,52,55,58 & District 51-unexpired 2yr term  
Constitutional Officers: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Treasurer, Attorney General, Comptroller  
US House (All) US Senate (Class 3 - Roland W. Burris)

**Kentucky Special Election**  
House District 24

**Missouri Special Election**  
House Districts 27, 57 and 62

**New Hampshire Special Primary**  
House Coos County District 2

# Budget & taxes

## FIRST FEDERAL STIMULUS HASN'T STIMULATED

**EMPLOYMENT:** The economic stimulus package passed by Congress 10 months ago included billions of dollars in funding for transportation projects that President Obama argued would address the "urgent need to accelerate



job growth.” But all of that money has had no effect on local unemployment, according to analysis by the Associated Press.

With talk in Washington and many state capitals of a second federal stimulus, the AP reviewed Transportation Department data on over \$21 billion in stimulus projects initiated this year in every state and the District of Columbia, along with monthly unemployment data compiled by the Labor Department. It found there was no difference in the unemployment rates of the roughly 700 counties that received the most stimulus money per capita for road construction and the roughly 700 counties that got no money at all.

“As a policy tool for creating jobs, this doesn’t seem to have much bite,” said Emory University economist Thomas Smith, one of several experts who reviewed the AP’s analysis. “In terms of creating jobs, it doesn’t seem like it’s created very many. It may well be employing lots of people but those two things are very different.”

“My bottom line is, I’d be skeptical about putting too much more money into a second stimulus until we’ve seen broader effects from the first stimulus,” said Aaron Jackson, a Bentley University economist.

Despite such skepticism, Obama wants a second stimulus bill that provides more road and bridge spending, and it appears he may get it. The House approved another stimulus bill — the \$75 billion Jobs for Main Street Act, which includes \$28 billion for transportation projects — last month, and the Senate is expected to take it up later this month.

There is also evidence that indicates the federal government’s stimulus efforts, including the \$700 Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) as well as the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, have eased the recession. For example, a recent Rutgers University study showed that all of the various programs have slowed the rise of unemployment in many states.

And it’s probably impossible to determine which of the myriad programs worked best, but singling out transportation for another round of spending is likely to be an easier sell than a lot of the other programs. Even some Republicans who have been critical of the stimulus support transportation spending.

Daniel Seiver, an economist at San Diego State University, said that’s a policy argument rather than a stimulus argument, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a bad idea.

“Infrastructure spending does have a long-term payoff, but in terms of an immediate impact on construction jobs it doesn’t seem to be showing up,” he said. “A program like

## The week in session

**States in Regular Session:** AK, AL, AZ, CA, CO, DC, DE, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KS, KY, MA, MD, ME, MO, MS, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NY, OH, PA, PR, RI, SC, TN, US, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV

**States in Recess:** IL, GA, PA

**States in Special Session:** CA “f”, CA “h”, TN “a”, WI “b”

**Upcoming Special Sessions:** OR “a”  
02/01/2010

**States Currently Prefiling or Drafting for 2010:** AK, AR, FL, MN, MT, ND, NM, OK, UT, WY

**State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2010:** CA “e”

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(session information current as of 1/15/2010)  
Source: State Net database



this may be justified but it's not going to have an immediate effect of putting people back to work.” (ASSOCIATED PRESS, CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER)

**BUDGETS IN BRIEF:** The Obama administration reported last week that the \$787-billion stimulus program saved or created 1.5 million to 2 million jobs last year. But the U.S. economy still lost more than 4 million jobs overall last year, including 85,000 in December, according to the Labor Department (LOS ANGELES TIMES). • The big tax incentives **PENNSYLVANIA** has offered to lure high-tech companies to the state have produced only mixed results, according to a study conducted by the nonprofit Good Jobs First. The state saw a net increase of 43 high-tech employers between 1990 and 2006 but a net loss of 2,850 jobs (WALL STREET JOURNAL). • Standard & Poor's downgraded **CALIFORNIA's** debt rating from A to A- last week due to concerns that the state may run out of cash and be forced once again to resort to IOUs as soon as March (STATELINE).

— Compiled by **KOREY CLARK**

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# Politics & leadership

**M**IDTERMS COULD SEE RECORD SPENDING: This year is shaping up to be a record one for campaign spending. The U.S. Supreme Court is expected any day to remove restrictions on advertisements for or against candidates funded by corporations and unions. But even if the justices rule narrowly in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, other recent court decisions rolling back spending rules to the days before the Watergate scandal have already opened up a wide space for independent groups to operate in.

“It will be no holds barred when it comes to independent expenditures,” said Kenneth A. Gross, an expert on political law at the Washington, D.C.-based firm Skadden Arps.

The 800-pound gorilla of the lobbying world, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, began probing the limits of the high court's recent rulings in the 2008 election with commercials like one that denounced Democratic U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen of NEW HAMPSHIRE as “a taxing machine.” And chamber officials say they intend to spend far more than the \$36 million they spent two years ago.

Labor unions are gearing up to spend record amounts themselves on Democratic candidates, but Karen Ackerman, political director of the A.F.L.-C.I.O, said, “The corporate side will always have more to spend than the union side.”

That could be even more of a problem for the Democrats with a broad ruling in the *Citizens United* case.



“Clearly, the Republican Party overwhelmingly would benefit,” said U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez of NEW JERSEY.

So far, Democratic candidates and party committees have raised \$396.5 million for the midterm elections in November, while Republicans have raised just \$204.7 million, according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics.

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn of TEXAS, chairman of the Republican Senate campaign committee, said the expected Supreme Court ruling could “open up resources that have not previously been available” for the GOP.

And some legal experts say if the high court strikes down the restrictions on independent spending, the remaining restrictions on direct corporate contributions would basically be meaningless because it would be so easy for corporate donors to support campaigns through independent groups.

“The campaign finance system would certainly be less regulated than any time since Watergate,” said Richard L. Hasen, a campaign law expert at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles (NEW YORK TIMES).

**POLITICS IN BRIEF: NEW YORK** legislative leaders proposed an ethics overhaul last week that would require elected officials to disclose more about their outside income and subject them to stricter oversight by investigative bodies with enhanced powers. But Gov. David Paterson (D) criticized the plan because it would not provide independent oversight over legislators and would exclude many from disclosing the names of outside business clients (NEW YORK TIMES). • Members of the **GEORGIA** House formally elected David Ralston (R) as their speaker. Ralston will fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Glenn Richardson (R) over allegations that he had an affair with a lobbyist (AUGUSTA CHRONICLE). • The nation’s longest-serving governor, **NORTH DAKOTA**’s John Hoeven (R), announced last week that he will run for the U.S. Senate (BISMARCK TRIBUNE). • Activists in **WASHINGTON** filed a ballot initiative last week to legalize all adult marijuana possession, manufacturing and sales in the state, one of the most sweeping marijuana legalization efforts in the country this year (SEATTLE TIMES).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

## Upcoming stories

Here are some of the topics you will see covered in upcoming issues of the State Net Capitol Journal:

- **State food stamp struggles**
- **More budget updates**
- **Health care reform**

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# Governors

**G**OVNS WANT FEDERAL MEDICAID BAILOUT: Governors of some large-population states are pondering a proposal from NEW YORK Gov. David Paterson (D) to ask the federal government to take over health care costs for the elderly poor who receive both Medicare and Medicaid benefits. Paterson says the plan would dramatically ease the states' massive budget problems and likely avert the need for a second federal stimulus package.

Paterson, whose state faces a projected \$8 billion budget shortfall for fiscal year 2010-11, says he has broached the subject with several large states, including CALIFORNIA, which is trying to close a budget gap of approximately \$20 billion. He did not name the other states.

The federal government taking on just the "dual membership" cases would save states about \$70 billion, Paterson said, enabling them to avoid Draconian cuts to education and other public services. States currently split their Medicaid costs with the feds, who pay for Medicare in full. But Paterson argues that administrating the programs is still a significant drain on state coffers.

"We think this is a spectacular proposal that we are going to float to other governors and talk about creating a national, bipartisan movement," Paterson said. "The system would work much better, and it really would be the answer to the states' problems of resources."

Medicaid payments have become a major issue in recent weeks in light of a deal hammered out by U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson (D-NEBRASKA) in which the federal government would permanently cover any of his state's costs for Medicaid expansion contained in current health care reform proposals. CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) and TENNESSEE Gov. Phil Bredesen (D) are among many who have railed against the deal, dubbed the "Cornhusker Kickback" by its critics. SOUTH CAROLINA Attorney General Henry McMaster, who is also a gubernatorial candidate, is leading a coalition of 14 attorneys general threatening to file a constitutional appeal to block the provision unless it is dropped from the reform bill.

The White House has not commented on Paterson's proposal, but CALIFORNIA Medicaid Director Toby Douglas said the Golden State would be interested in any "approaches that better coordinate care for our dual eligibles across our Medicare and Medicaid systems." (ASSOCIATED PRESS)

**STATE OF THE STATES:** Several governors conducted "State of the State" addresses last week. Although focused primarily on closing significant budget gaps, govns touched on a variety of other issues as well. (For more on the govns' budget proposals, see *SNCJ Spotlight* in this issue).



Ethics was a prime issue in at least two states. ALABAMA Gov. Bob Riley (R) pushed an ethics package that would require lobbyists to disclose expenditures on public officials and give subpoena power to the Ethics Commission. He also lobbied for legalizing charter schools in the Heart of Dixie. ILLINOIS Gov. Pat Quinn (D), who took office last year after lawmakers impeached former Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D), promoted a constitutional amendment that would allow voters to put ethics reform proposals on the ballot.

Meanwhile, crime and education also received attention. WASHINGTON Gov. Chris Gregoire (D) proposed a new sentencing option for mentally ill offenders that would allow the Evergreen State to treat them in prison instead of in a state psychiatric hospital, while WEST VIRGINIA Gov. Joe Manchin (D) proposed a plan to speed up the parole process for non-violent offenders. He also asked lawmakers to pass a bill ensuring that all public schools provide 180 instruction days each year. ARIZONA Gov. Jan Brewer (R) also pushed for education reform, urging lawmakers to produce legislation that would require all third-graders to prove they can read at grade level, loosening the qualification requirements for teachers and moving student report cards online. (CHICAGO TRIBUNE, ARIZONA DAILY SUN [FLAGSTAFF], MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER, CHARLESTON GAZETTE)

**TEXAS OUT OF RACE TO THE TOP:** Saying it “would be foolish and irresponsible to place our children’s future in the hands of unelected bureaucrats and special interest groups thousands of miles away in Washington,” TEXAS Gov. Rick Perry (R) said the Lone Star State will not apply for federal Race to the Top education

**“By throwing in the towel before the competition has even begun, Gov. Perry has officially won the race to the bottom.”**

funds. Perry complained that the federal dollars come with too many conditions, arguing that, “If Washington were truly concerned about funding education with solutions that match local challenges, they would make the money available to states with no strings attached.” Perry specifically noted that the Race to the

Top funds require schools to adhere to national curriculum standards, “virtually eliminating parents’ participation in their children’s education.”

State Education Commissioner Robert Scott endorsed the decision. “This one-time grant program would result in mandates for districts that would last for decades,” he said. State Democrats, however, didn’t see it that way. “By throwing in the towel before the competition has even begun, Gov. Perry has officially won the race to the bottom,” said state Rep. Jim Dunnam (D), who chairs the House Select Committee on Federal Economic Stabilization Funding. TEXAS and ALASKA are the only states that have declined to seek Race to the Top grants.



**SC HOUSE CENSURES SANFORD:** The SOUTH CAROLINA House officially censured Gov. Mark Sanford (R) for his conduct in relation to an extramarital affair that became public last year. It is the first time in Palmetto State history that the House has issued a rebuke to a sitting governor. The House cited Sanford for dereliction of duties, official misconduct and abuse of power when he traveled in June 2008 and June 2009 to see his mistress in Argentina. The resolution claims Sanford's actions, which included trips he took on state aircraft for alleged personal and political reasons, brought "ridicule, dishonor, shame and disgrace to himself, the state of South Carolina and to its citizens." The measure, which carries no actual penalty, is now in the Senate. (POST & COURIER [CHARLESTON])

**EXECUTIVE ORDERS:** NEW MEXICO Gov. Bill Richardson (D) signs EO 2010-001, which directs six cabinet offices to oversee planning and development of initiatives to promote renewable energy, assist in green business development and create green jobs (NEW MEXICO GOVERNOR'S OFFICE). • NEW JERSEY Gov. Jon Corzine (D) issues EO No. 164, which establishes the Commission on New Americans, an agency tasked with overseeing the state's inter-departmental collaboration regarding immigrant integration policies (OFFICE OF THE NEW JERSEY GOVERNOR).

**GOVERNORS IN BRIEF:** Outgoing NEW JERSEY Gov. Jon Corzine (D) leaves office this week on a particularly low note. A new Farleigh Dickinson-Public Mind poll showed that 60 percent of Garden State voters have a low opinion of him, and 40 percent think he did a poor job as governor. Corzine lost his re-election bid last November to Republican Chris Christie (STAR-LEDGER [NEWARK]). • GEORGIA Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) proposed basing at least half of a Peach State teacher's pay on student achievement rather than current measures such as seniority or whether they hold an advanced degree. Perdue said that recent state surveys showed that 80 percent of the state's teachers support the idea (ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

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## Hot issues

**B**USINESS: The NEW JERSEY General Assembly endorses AB 4063, which requires that when a property is sold at a foreclosure sale, the buyer must notify tenants of their right to stay in their homes and explain to whom they should pay rent. The measure also makes lenders responsible for maintaining a property between the time a foreclosure filing is made and the sale. The bill moves

to Gov. Jon Corzine (D) for consideration (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER). • The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in **NEW YORK** revives a lawsuit that accuses the nation's four major record labels of conspiring to fix the prices and terms under which music is sold over the Internet. A lower court had tossed out the suit, which charges Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group Corp., EMI Music North America and Sony BMG Music Entertainment of conspiring to charge at least 70 cents a song on the Internet, even though their costs are much lower than in record stores. The court cited, among other things, a similar ongoing investigation by the Empire State attorney general (ASSOCIATED PRESS). • The **INDIANA** House approves HB 1120, legislation that would allow Hoosier State officials to levy a \$500 fine against companies that intentionally misclassify contract workers in an effort to avoid paying workers compensation insurance fees and other payroll taxes. It moves to the Senate (SOUTH BEND TRIBUNE).

**CRIME & PUNISHMENT:** A three-judge federal panel approves a court-ordered plan submitted by **CALIFORNIA** Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) to reduce overcrowding in Golden State prisons by 40,000 inmates within two years. The governor has appealed the panel's order to the U.S. Supreme Court (LOS ANGELES TIMES) • **ILLINOIS** Gov. Pat Quinn (D) signs SB 1013, a bill that requires Prairie State inmates to serve at least 60 days in jail before they could be eligible for early release for good behavior. The bill also requires corrections officials to give local prosecutors 14 days' notice that an inmate is going to be released (PEORIA JOURNAL STAR, STATE NET). • **NEW JERSEY** Gov. Jon Corzine (D) signs AB 2762, which allows Garden State judges to levy less than the previous mandatory minimum prison terms to people selling drugs in school zones. The new statute lets judges consider the crime's proximity to school grounds, whether children were present and whether school was in session (STAR-LEDGER [NEWARK]). • The **KENTUCKY** House endorses HB 1, which would require some people accused of domestic violence to wear a global-positioning device. It is now in the Senate (COURIER-JOURNAL [LOUISVILLE]). • An **OHIO** House committee approves SB 77, which would require Buckeye State police to take a DNA sample from anyone charged with a felony. It is now with the full House (COLUMBUS DISPATCH).

**EDUCATION:** The **NEW JERSEY** Assembly and Senate decline to take up AB 194, a bill that would have allowed illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at Garden State colleges and universities (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER). • **KENTUCKY** Gov. Steve Beshear (D) signs HB 176, which allows school districts to close low-performing public schools and restart them under the management of a private or nonprofit operator known as an educational management organization. The bill does not establish charter schools (COURIER-JOURNAL [LOUISVILLE]). • **ILLINOIS** Gov. Pat Quinn (D) signs SB 315, a bill that requires student performance to be considered in evaluations



for teachers and administrators (SPRINGFIELD JOURNAL-REGISTER, STATE NET).

**ENVIRONMENT:** The **NEW JERSEY** Assembly and Senate endorse AB 4345, a bill that would delay new water quality rules to limit the installation of new sewer lines and septic systems. It is now with Gov. Jon Corzine (D) (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER). •

**CALIFORNIA** officials adopt new building codes considered to be the most environmentally stringent in the nation. The new standards require builders to install highly efficient plumbing, recycle at least 50 percent of all construction waste, use low-pollutant paints, carpets and floorings and install separate water meters in nonresidential buildings. The rule also mandates that local officials inspect energy systems to ensure that nonresidential heating and cooling systems are working efficiently, and allows local jurisdictions to retain stricter existing green building standards or adopt more stringent versions of the state code if they choose (SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE).

**HEALTH AND SCIENCE:** The **NEW JERSEY** Assembly and Senate endorse SB 119, which would make the Garden State the 14<sup>th</sup> to allow people with debilitating illnesses to smoke marijuana under a doctor’s prescription. Under the proposal, the state would license medical marijuana dispensaries, bar residents from growing their own pot, and require designated caretakers who retrieve the drug on behalf of a severely ill person to undergo criminal background checks. It moves to Gov. Jon Corzine (D), who has pledged to sign it into law (STAR-LEDGER [NEWARK]). • Still in **NEW JERSEY**, lawmakers also approve AB 2029, a bill that would allow chiropractors to prescribe medical tests, provide nutritional counseling, sell vitamins and supplements and call themselves “chiropractic physicians.” It moves to Gov. Jon Corzine (D) for review (STAR-LEDGER [NEWARK]).

**SOCIAL POLICY:** In a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court overturns a lower court ruling allowing the trial on the constitutionality of a **CALIFORNIA** law barring same-sex marriage to be televised live at courthouses around the country and later uploaded to YouTube. The high court said the lower court judge had not allowed enough public comment time before allowing the telecasts, and agreed with the pro-ban side’s contention that broadcasting the trial could discourage witness testimony (SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE). • **RHODE ISLAND** lawmakers override a veto by Gov. Don Carcieri (R) of HB 5294/SB 195, a measure that allows domestic partners, including same-sex partners, to make funeral arrangements for one another (PAWTUCKET TIMES).

## In case you missed it

In our latest one-on-one interview, we sat down with **CALIFORNIA** Senate Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D) to discuss life under the Golden State Capitol dome, including the historic water overhaul he brokered last year and the state’s latest staggering budget deficit.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at [http://www.statenet.com/capitol\\_journal/01-11-2010/html](http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/01-11-2010/html)

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# Once around the statehouse lightly

**OPEN MOUTH, INSERT FOOT:** In case you somehow have not noticed, impeached ILLINOIS governor Rod Blagojevich is often his own worst enemy. As the *Chicago Tribune* reports, Blagojevich, who is currently awaiting trial on federal corruption charges, apologized last week for insisting in a magazine interview that he was “blacker than Barack Obama.” Blago hastily backpedaled from the comment, which came just a week after he autographed a copy of the U.S. Constitution with a vulgarity that referenced the government’s charges that he tried to sell Obama’s U.S. Senate seat, calling it “[expletive] golden.” On a happier note, *Time* magazine did place Blagojevich — a noted Elvis Presley fan who once warbled out the King’s “Treat Me Nice” in public — second on their list of notable Elvis impersonators.

**WE HOPE YOU’RE KIDDING:** What’s in a word? A lot, according to WASHINGTON state Sen. Rosa Franklin. As the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* reports, Franklin wants to eradicate the use of the terms “at risk” and “disadvantaged” in reference to kids from tough economic circumstances. As she sees it, those euphemisms are negative and serve only to reinforce the stigma of poverty. Thus, she has introduced legislation to change the 54 places in state law where those terms are used in favor of the phrase “children at hope.” Ironically, the term “at risk” came about decades ago when well meaning lawmakers opined it was nicer than referring to poor kids as, well, poor.

**STOP CARPING ALREADY:** There is a fair amount of heartburn these days over the possible invasion of Asian carp into the Great Lakes. But while government officials are popping a gill over the bottom feeder’s arrival, the *Chicago Tribune* reports that some folks think the government ought to stop carping and look on the bright side: the Asian carp, they say, tastes really good. The carp is in fact a very popular staple in many ethnic dishes, though its boniness tends to require diners to do a fair amount of work. Still, experts believe the real problem is the fish’s unappealing name, which sounds like a noise your dog makes after eating something bad from the garbage. Case in point, they say, is that until recently there was virtually no market for the Patagonia toothfish. Fine diners know that one better these days as the Chilean Sea Bass.

**A TRULY HAIRY PROPOSITION:** When NORTH DAKOTA Gov. John Hoeven announced he would run for the U.S. Senate, inquiring minds immediately



wanted to know whether he would shave off his trademark mustache. Opinion strongly favors Hoeven keeping his lip fur. The *Los Angeles Times*, for one, opined that Hoeven “would bring a much-needed mustache to the Senate.” The *Grand Forks Herald* also took note of a 2008 blog posting from a group called the American Mustache Institute that lauds Hoeven’s ‘stache, saying it “implies that he is steady, hard-working, no-nonsense, responsible, and maybe even a little rugged.” Not to worry, says Hoeven spokesman Don Canton — his oh-so-rugged boss is not about to get cozy with a razor. “He’s pretty attached to that mustache, and that mustache is pretty attached to him,” he says.

— By *RICH EHISEN*

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**Graphic Design:** Vanessa Perez  
 ©2008 State Net ISSN: 1521-8449



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