

# Pump Politics

May 12, 2008



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The next issue of Capitol Journal will be available on May 19th.

## Top Story

*Rising gas prices have the presidential candidates debating the merits of a gas-tax holiday, something several states are already considering. But critics say the idea is running on empty.*

## SNCJ Spotlight

### State calls for gas tax holidays fueled by compassion and politics

Americans' growing frustration with the soaring price of gas has spurred two of the three remaining presidential candidates, Sens. John McCain and Hillary Clinton, to call for a federal gas-tax holiday this summer. As a recent Clinton ad promoting the idea put it: "People are hurting. It's time for a president who's ready to take action, now." The other candidate, Sen. Barack Obama, opposes the plan, saying it would save individual drivers little and cost the federal government a lot.

The same debate is going on in a handful of states, which tend to have a much bigger impact on the price Americans pay at the pump. In FLORIDA, Gov. Charlie Crist (R) has been pushing a proposal to trim 10 cents off the 33-cent gas tax his state imposes on motorists. The state Legislature ended its regular session May 2 without approving the plan, but Crist still hasn't given up on it.

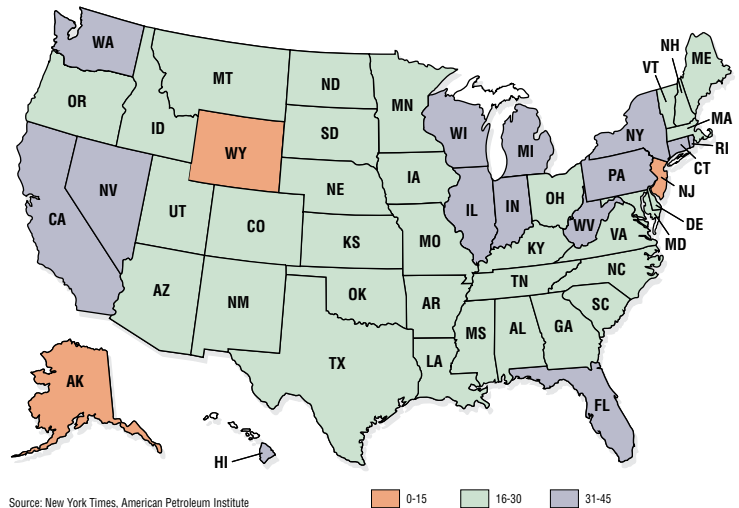
"It's about trying to serve the people and trying to understand and have caring, compassionate hearts for what they're dealing with at the kitchen table," he said.

Two measures that are still in play in state legislatures are NEW YORK SB 7594, which would cut the Empire State's 41.2-cent gas tax by about 32 cents from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and MISSOURI HB 1644, which would take a slightly different approach, allowing drivers to submit their gas purchase receipts to the state at the end of the summer and receive a rebate check.

Critics argue that the potential savings gas-tax holidays promise aren't always fully realized by consumers. When ILLINOIS and INDIANA implemented gas-tax holidays in the summer of 2000, reducing their levies by about 7 cents, prices at the pump only dropped an average of 4 cents, according to the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, which opposed the measures. And the association said while the holidays saved drivers about \$2.50 per month, they cost the states tens of millions of dollars in revenue.

Critics say gas tax holidays can also cause other problems. During FLORIDA's holiday in 2004, for instance, people hoarded gas, increasing demand and further elevating prices.

## Bird's eye view



### Handful of states considering summer gas tax holidays

Soaring gas prices across the nation have the presidential candidates debating whether the 18.4-cent federal gas tax should be suspended for the summer. But with state gas taxes — which averaged 28.6 cents in the first quarter of 2008 — often having a much greater impact on the price at the pump, a few states are looking at granting their own summer gas tax holidays. FLORIDA Gov. Charlie Christ (R), for instance, has been pushing to cut the Sunshine State's 33.2-cent levy by 10 cents for two weeks in July. State lawmakers in NEW YORK have proposed trimming about 32 cents from the 41.2 cents drivers pay in state gas taxes there. And MISSOURI is considering a summer rebate program for motorists who incur its 17.6-cent gas tax. The accompanying map shows approximately how much each state adds in taxes to the price of a gallon of gas.





Others point out that gas prices aren't the only thing American consumers are currently frustrated about. But John Felmy, chief economist for the American Petroleum Institute, said there's a good reason lawmakers have focused on his industry.

**“It’s just politics. If they take the taxes away on gas, they’ll probably find someplace else to stick it in.”**

“It clearly evokes a visceral response because we’re the only industry that has our prices in two-foot-high letters on the street corner,” he said. “We’ve seen other things go up in prices, like milk, but if you ask 10 people on the street what’s the price of milk they may not know. All of them will know the price of gas.”

Some of them, however, are skeptical that gas-tax holidays are the answer to the problem.

“It’s just politics,” said one FLORIDA driver. “If they take the taxes away on gas, they’ll probably find someplace else to stick it in.” (NEW YORK TIMES)

– Compiled by KOREY CLARK

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## Budget & taxes

**S**TATES SEEKING TIGHTER REGULATION OF PRIVATE MEDICARE PLANS: State insurance officials are about to ask Congress for greater authority to regulate the sale of private Medicare plans, which now provide prescription drug coverage and other health services for 25 million of the nation’s 44 million Medicare beneficiaries.

One reason the officials are doing so is they’ve been receiving an increasing number of complaints from older Americans who’ve been pressured into signing up for such plans.

“There are many good, conscientious agents, but we still see predatory sales of private Medicare plans,” said Mary Jo Hudson, director of OHIO’s Insurance Department. “Agents go door to door in senior housing complexes and tell seniors they have to buy a particular product, or they will lose their Medicare benefits.”

The state officials say the preferential treatment the federal government gives private Medicare plans, such as Medicare Advantage — paying them 13 percent more, on average, than traditional Medicare plans — creates a lot of incentive for insurers to push the plans aggressively, which in some cases, has led to misconduct by agents.

The industry has acknowledged the problem and has been working with the Bush administration to curtail abuses. But as Guenther H. Ruch, head of regulation



and enforcement for WISCONSIN’s Insurance Department, stated: “It does not appear to us that the misconduct has been reduced much. We saw a huge uptick in complaints in the last two or three weeks of March, as the annual open enrollment period for Medicare Advantage plans was ending.”

But state officials say they can’t adequately address the problem either under the current regulatory system, which gives states the power to regulate insurance agents and brokers who sell private Medicare plans but not the insurance companies that offer them, which fall under federal jurisdiction.

“We have authority over agents,” said the OHIO Insurance Department’s Hudson. “The agents are working on behalf of insurance companies, but we are pre-empted from regulating the companies. It’s as if we had both hands tied behind our back.”

Consequently, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners is working on a report urging Congress to allow states to set and enforce common standards for marketing private Medicare plans. Congressional lawmakers will have an opportunity to do that soon, with legislation now before them that will cut Medicare payments to doctors 10 percent on July 1, unless they act. (NEW YORK TIMES)

**TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES MAKING STATES LESS TOUGH ON**

**CRIME:** Liberal politicians have been saying for years that some felons, particularly minor drug offenders, ought to receive treatment instead of lengthy prison sentences. And many states are finally starting to come around to that way of thinking. Not because of any change of heart on crime but because of dwindling revenues and the reality that having fewer people locked up saves money.

CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) has proposed releasing about 22,000 inmates convicted of nonviolent, nonsexual offenses 20 months early in part to save the state \$1.1 billion over two years. Two weeks ago, RHODE ISLAND lawmakers approved an expansion of the state’s “good time” early-release program, which is expected to save the state \$8 billion over five years. And SOUTH CAROLINA is considering doing away with parole to slow the growth of its prison population, the thinking being that former inmates would no longer be returning to prison for parole violations.

**The week in session**

**States in Regular Session:** AZ, CA, DC, DE, IL, LA, MA, MI, MN, MO, MS, NH, NJ, NY, OH, OK, PA, RI, SC, TN, US

**States in Special Session:** PA “a”, WI “c”, WI “d”, WI “e”

**States in Recess:** AL, KS, WI

**Special Sessions in Recess:** CA “a”, CA “b”

**States in Perfunctory Session:** IL Special Sessions “a”-“s”

**States Currently Prefiling or Drafting for 2009:** MT, ND

**States Projected to Adjourn:** AZ, MO

**States Adjourned in 2008:** AK, CO, CT, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KY, MD, ME, MS, NE, NM, SD, UT, VA, VT, WA, WV, WY

**State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2008:** AR “a”, CT “a”, DE “a”, LA “a”, LA “b”, ME “a”, NC “b”, OR “a”, VA “a”, WV “a”

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(session information current as of 05/09/2008)  
Source: State Net database



The proposals have plenty of critics, including law enforcement officials, who don't like the idea of felons flooding into their communities, and victims groups that believe justice shouldn't be sacrificed for fiscal concerns.

One CALIFORNIA resident, meanwhile, takes exception to the fact that those convicted of drunk driving would be among those released early under the proposal being considered in his state. "I guarantee you that if this program is fulfilled, somewhere down the road — it could be three months or a year — there's going to be a family in court over the death of a loved one, because of someone who got out early," said Bob Pack, who's two children were killed by a drunk driver in 2003. (WASHINGTON POST)

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**MA LAWMAKERS EYE COLLEGE ENDOWMENTS: MASSACHUSETTS**

lawmakers have come up with a novel idea for bolstering the state's coffers: get a piece of the action of the state's well-heeled private colleges. Last week the House called for a study on a plan to impose a 2.5 percent annual assessment on private colleges in the state with endowments over \$1 billion, which would impact nine institutions: Amherst College, Boston College, Boston University, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Smith College, Tufts University, Wellesley College and Williams College.

The proposal, believed to be the first of its kind in the nation, raises several questions, such as should a private college lose its tax-exempt status if it's acquiring a great deal of wealth? For some, in the case of an institution like Harvard, which has an endowment of \$34 billion and contributes little to its host community, the answer is an unequivocal yes. "It's mind boggling that one entity not paying taxes has \$34

**"It's mind boggling that one entity not paying taxes has \$34 billion. How to you justify that?"**

billion. How to you justify that?" said Rep. Paul Kujawski (D), who serves on the House Ways and Means Committee and is the primary backer

of the plan. But university leaders said the plan would hurt the institutions that are critical to the well-being of the state. "You'd be taxing success here," said Harvard's Associate Vice President for Government, Community and Public Affairs Kevin Casey. "Over time, this would put us at a real competitive disadvantage, which would drastically hurt the Commonwealth." (BOSTON GLOBE)



**BUDGETS IN BRIEF: TENNESSEE** Gov. Phil Bredesen (D) announced last week that his administration will try to use voluntary buyouts instead of layoffs to trim the state workforce by about 2,000 employees (TENNESSEAN [NASHVILLE]). • **CALIFORNIA** Senate Republican leader Dave Cogdill said last Tuesday that his party will oppose any tax hikes in next year’s budget. Cogdill suggested the \$16 billion deficit projected for next year could be managed by cutting services and tapping into three funds approved by voters for early childhood education, mental health services and transportation (SACRAMENTO BEE). • The **MASSACHUSETTS** Senate approved a nearly \$500 million tax package, which included a dollar-a-pack increase in the cigarette tax (BOSTON HERALD). • **MAINE** election officials said last week that they have received applications from four groups seeking the repeal of a pair of tax increases passed recently to help pay for the state’s Dirigo Health program (PORTLAND PRESS HERALD).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

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# Politics & leadership

**B**LAGOJEVICH ACCUSED OF TRADING FAVORS TO AVOID  
**RECALL:** When the ILLINOIS Senate narrowly rejected a plan two weeks ago that would have allowed voters to recall Gov. Rod Blagojevich (R), 21 senators either declined to vote or didn’t show up at all. And shortly afterward some of those senators’ districts saw a surge of jobs and money.

Sen. Arthur Wilhelmi (D), for instance, who voted present at the May 1 tally, said the following day that the Stateville Correctional Center in his district, which had been threatened with closure by Blagojevich, would remain open. The same day the Department of Transportation announced that it was shifting more than 100 jobs from Springfield to the district of Sen. Gary Forby (D), who was absent for the vote, reportedly visiting a family member who was having surgery.

The day before the vote was held, the Blagojevich administration promised legislators that it planned to release \$38 million in agricultural and 4-H funds it had been withholding. Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn (D) didn’t think that was just a coincidence.

“[The governor’s office] basically told senators if you want this money back, then you have to vote ‘no’ on recall,” he said.

Sen. Wilhelmi denied the governor’s change of heart about his district’s correctional facility had anything to do with his vote.

“There is no connection,” he said.

Forby, likewise, said no one from the governor’s office or anywhere else had offered him jobs in exchange for his vote.

“It could be taken that way,” he said. “But I’ve got enough proof to back up what I say and what I do.”  
(CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, CHICAGO TRIBUNE)

**OHIO AG REFUSES TO RESIGN OVER HARASSMENT SCANDAL:** Two weeks ago, OHIO Attorney General Marc Dann (D) admitted to having an extramarital affair with a subordinate in his office after a sexual harassment investigation threatened to expose the relationship. Calls for his resignation came almost immediately from his fellow Democrats.

“Sadly, we no longer have even the most remote hope that you can continue to serve as Attorney General and that is why we are asking for your resignation,” stated a letter to Dann signed by virtually every state-level Democratic officeholder, along with U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D).

The Democrats are very sensitive to the fact that many of them, including Dann, were swept into office by the Noe investment scandal that tainted Republican Gov. Bob Taft.

“When there were those problems, the Republican party sort of circled the wagons and tried to protect him,” said Sen. Brown. “The difference is, we think when there’s a problem on our side, that we fix it, we correct it, we get a new attorney general and we move on.”

But Dann isn’t going along with the plan. Although he has conceded that his behavior contributed to inappropriate conduct in his office, including the sexual harassment of two junior staffers by one of his aides — who was fired as a result — he insists that he’s still capable of doing his job.

“I am in the office, have rolled up my sleeves and am working on behalf of the people of the State of OHIO,” he wrote in a message last week to his staff that he released to the public.

If Dann refuses to leave voluntarily, however, his fellow Dems may force him out. Gov. Ted Strickland (D) told reporters that his party was planning to start drafting an impeachment resolution right away.  
(BEACON JOURNAL [AKRON])

## Upcoming elections

05/08/2008 - 05/29/2008

05/10/2008

### **Texas Special Election**

House 119

05/13/2008

### **Georgia Special Election**

House District 093 (Sailor)

### **Mississippi Special Election Runoff**

US House (MS 1st Congressional District)

### **Nebraska Primary Election**

Legislature (Odd)

US Senate (Hagel)

### **West Virginia Primary Election**

House (All)

Senate (All)

Constitutional Officers: Governor, Secretary of State, Treasurer, Attorney General, Auditor, Commissioner of Agriculture

US House (All)

US Senate (Rockefeller)

05/20/2008

### **Arkansas Primary Election**

House (All)

Senate 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 17, 20, 23, 24, 25,

26, 30, 31, 32, 33

US House (All)

US Senate (Pryor)

### **Kentucky Primary Election**

House (All)

Senate (Odd)

US House (All)

US Senate (McConnell)

### **Oregon Primary Election**

House (All)

Senate 1, 2, 5, 9, 12, 14, 18, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30

Constitutional Officers: Secretary of State, Treasurer, Attorney General

US House (All)

US Senate (Smith)

05/27/2008

### **Idaho Primary Election**

House (All)

Senate (All)

US House (All)

US Senate (Craig)



## CA LAWMAKERS SKIRTING CAMPAIGN

**DONATION LIMITS:** Under a law passed in 2000, CALIFORNIA lawmakers are barred from accepting direct contributions to their campaigns larger than \$3,600. But some legislative leaders are still soliciting tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars from donors. And it's perfectly legal. They're simply creating ballot measure committees, which have no contribution limits. No specific ballot measure is even required. They just can't use the money in the ballot measure account to fund their re-election campaign.

Ross Johnson, chairman of the Fair Political Practices Commission, CALIFORNIA's campaign watchdog agency, said the ballot accounts raise influence issues.

"It doesn't matter what pocket that special interest is putting the money in," he said. "Whether it's your shirt pocket or your coat pocket or your pants pocket, it is the

**"It doesn't matter what pocket that special interest is putting the money in. Whether it's your shirt pocket or your coat pocket or your pants pocket, it is the receipt of the money that carries with it the potential for undue influence."**

and spend that \$1 million (donation) on advertising in your legislative district, featuring you, just so you don't use these magic words of 'Vote for (me).'"

Outgoing Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez (D) did something very much like that last year when he spent over \$300,000 from his ballot account to run TV ads, featuring him, that touted a healthcare proposal he backed, and the year before,

**"Having one of these committees is an act not just of politics but of governance. You are naked without it."**

when he spent \$750,000 for ads plugging the "Perata plan" for rebuilding the state's infrastructure.

But Joe Mathews, Irvine senior fellow at the New America Foundation, a nonpartisan think tank, said that with so much policy being decided at the ballot box these days, top lawmakers can't afford to do without the accounts.

"Having one of these committees is an act not just of politics but of governance," he said. "You are naked without it." (SACRAMENTO BEE)

## Upcoming stories

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

- Plastic bag recycling
- Nuclear power
- Health insurance







**LINGLE’S HOUSING MEASURES DEAD:**

The close of the HAWAII legislative session last week meant an end to several low-income and homeless housing measures championed by Gov. Linda Lingle (R). Aloha State lawmakers killed or drastically cut funding for at least four Lingle-supported bills, which included proposals to increase the number of homeless shelters, add more funds and programs to homeless programs and also add to the state’s inventory of low-income housing. One such measure, HB 3059, cleared both legislative chambers but died in a conference committee at the last minute. The bill would have shortened the time for investors to use tax credits to build new low-income housing projects, which supporters said would have made them more competitive. Lingle said she also asked for but was denied funding to build a permanent homeless shelter in Honolulu. The governor was clearly unhappy with those results, saying, “[Lawmakers] just assume the public is not watching what they say at the beginning of the session and what actually comes out of the Legislature.”

**In case you missed it**

Studies show that a staggering number of man-made items leach toxic chemicals into our bodies every day. Now, as reported in the May 5 issue of SNCJ, a growing number of states are working to weed those chemicals out of consumer products.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at [http://www.statenet.com/capitol\\_journal/05-05-2008/html](http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/05-05-2008/html)

**SEBELIUS LIKELY TO ISSUE THIRD COAL VETO: KANSAS Gov.**

Kathleen Sebelius (D) hinted that she will likely veto yet another attempt by lawmakers to push through legislation to allow the building of two coal-fired power plants in the Sunflower State. Sebelius has already vetoed two such measures this session. This time, lawmakers bundled the proposal (HB 2412) with several other economic development issues Sebelius is known to favor. House Speaker Melvin Neufeld (R) said he believed that by doing so she would allow the bill to become law without her signature. But Sebelius shot that idea down almost immediately, saying the measure was likely unconstitutional because it deals with more than one subject. “Having vetoed the component parts, at least involving coal, and having very serious questions about the framework itself — the option of not signing it and letting it become law, I would say, is off the table,” she said. (LAWRENCE JOURNAL-WORLD)

**GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: ARKANSAS Gov. Mike Beebe (D) urged all**

Razorback State schools to install tornado-safe rooms after almost a dozen twisters rolled through the state, narrowly missing several schools. At least seven people died in the storms (WASHINGTON POST). • **MICHIGAN Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D)** was taking it easy at home last week after undergoing emergency surgery to remove a blockage in her lower intestine. She is expected to remain at home for at least another week (DETROIT FREE PRESS). • **RHODE ISLAND Gov. Don Carcieri (R)** vetoed legislation that would have allowed 24-hour gambling at two Ocean State casinos. Supporters wanted to expand gaming as a way to produce additional state revenue, but the communities where the casinos are located have vigorously objected for months. Carcieri said he could not support forcing them to go along against their will.



Supporters, however, say they will seek a veto override (PROVIDENCE JOURNAL).  
• **NEW MEXICO** Gov. Bill Richardson (D) said last week that he believes security is improving along his state's border with Mexico. Richardson said he would ask U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Tony Garza to reevaluate an April travel alert issued by the U.S. State Department that warned U.S. citizens of rising violence in northern Mexico (USA TODAY).

— Compiled by RICH EHISEN

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## Hot issues

**B**USINESS: The **CALIFORNIA** Assembly approves AB 1943, which would require airlines to provide electrical service, fresh air and light, waste removal service and adequate food and drinking water to passengers on flights that have boarded but then been delayed for three hours or more. It flies off to the Senate (SACRAMENTO BEE). • The **HAWAII** Legislature approves HB 2438, a bill that would require all cigarettes sold in the Aloha State to be “fire safe,” which self-extinguish if left unattended. The measure moves to Gov. Linda Lingle (R), who is expected to sign it into law (HONOLULU STAR BULLETIN). • **OKLAHOMA** lawmakers approve HB 3341, which would require that only fire-safe cigarettes be sold in the Sooner State. It is now with Gov. Brad Henry (D) for review (OKLAHOMAN [OKLAHOMA CITY]). • The **MINNESOTA** Legislature approves a proposal to raise the minimum wage for workers at large employers by 60 cents to \$6.75 in July, with another dollar hike within a year. Smaller employers would have to pay workers at least \$5.75 an hour beginning this July and \$6.75 by July 2009. Businesses with annual sales above \$625,000 are considered large employers. The proposal moves to Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R) for review (MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE). • The **CONNECTICUT** Senate approves legislation to raise the state minimum wage from \$7.65 to \$8 next year and to \$8.25 by 2010. It moves to Gov. M. Jodi Rell (R) for review (HARTFORD COURANT). • Also in **CONNECTICUT**, the House and Senate approve HB 5577, legislation that, among other things, would enact new restrictions and licensing requirements on mortgage lenders and brokers. The measure would also create both a foreclosure mediation program and an emergency mortgage assistance program. It moves to Gov. Rell for review (HARTFORD COURANT). • Still in **CONNECTICUT**, the Senate approves legislation that would ban the sale of toys and other items marketed for children younger than 16 that contain asbestos or elevated quantities of lead. It heads to Rell (R) for review (HARTFORD COURANT). • The **LOUISIANA** Senate approves SB 807, which would allow companies to obtain a single statewide franchise to offer cable TV service. It moves to the House (ADVOCATE [BATON ROUGE]).



**CRIME & PUNISHMENT:** The **KANSAS** House and Senate endorse HB 2617, which allows police to order a test for drugs or alcohol in vehicle accidents that result in a death or serious injury. The proposal moves to Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D) for consideration (LAWRENCE JOURNAL WORLD). • **GEORGIA** Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) signs SB 16, legislation that makes it a felony to train, transport, sell or own a fighting dog, or to promote or advertise a fight. Attending a dog fight becomes a high misdemeanor (ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION). • Still in **GEORGIA**, Perdue signs legislation that makes it illegal for businesses to sell marijuana-flavored candy to minors. Violators face a \$500 fine (MACON TELEGRAPH).

**EDUCATION:** The **NORTH CAROLINA** attorney general tells the Tar Heel State community college system that it should stop allowing illegal immigrants to attend those schools. The AG says higher education is a public benefit not required to be open to illegal residents. The opinion is advisory and not legally binding (NEWS & OBSERVER [CHARLOTTE]). • **IOWA** Gov. Chet Culver (D) signs legislation that prohibits lenders from providing gifts to college financial aid officials to lure customers. The new law also gives the Hawkeye State attorney general greater oversight and enforcement power over practices related to borrowing and lending (DES MOINES REGISTER).

**ENVIRONMENT:** The **ARIZONA** Governor's Regulatory Review Council adopts a policy requiring a 30 percent reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions from new cars and trucks sold in the Grand Canyon State by 2016. Opponents say they will likely challenge the policy in court (ARIZONA REPUBLIC [PHOENIX]). • The **KANSAS** Legislature approves HB 2412, a third attempt to authorize the construction of two 700-megawatt coal-fired power plants and strip the state of authority to block similar projects. The proposal heads now to Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D), who has already vetoed two previous authorization measures this session (LAWRENCE JOURNAL-WORLD).

**HEALTH & SCIENCE:** The **FLORIDA** Legislature approves SB 2534, a proposal from Gov. Charlie Crist (R) that would allow Sunshine State officials to negotiate low-cost health-care plans for as many as 3.8 million uninsured residents. The plans would be available to individuals or small businesses and would cost between \$100 and \$150 a month per person, and would cover most basic preventive services, emergency care, hospitalization and office visits. The bill now goes to Crist for signing (TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT). • **GEORGIA** Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) signs HB 977, a bill that exempts health care insurers from state premium taxes for the sale of high deductible individual health plans. The measure also allows consumers who buy the policies to take a tax deduction for the cost of the premium, and the state insurance commissioner to speed up approval of individual health savings accounts that let



consumers use pre-tax dollars to save for health care costs (ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION). • The **KANSAS** Legislature endorses legislation that would require insurance companies to offer more health plans that can be paid for on a pre-tax basis, direct more money toward programs for low-income pregnant women and safety net clinics; and extends the amount of time individuals are eligible to receive COBRA insurance in between jobs. It heads to Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D) for review (WICHITA EAGLE). • The **MINNESOTA** House approves a measure that ensures the state university may use public funds to carry out embryonic stem cell research. The bill moves to the Senate (ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS).

**IMMIGRATION:** The **SOUTH CAROLINA** House approves legislation that would require private employers to verify the legal status of new workers using either a driver's license or the federal E-verify electronic verification system. Companies that repeatedly hire undocumented workers would face fines and a 30-day loss of their business license. The bill moves back to the Senate to review changes made in the House (GREENVILLE NEWS). • A **LOUISIANA** House panel sends HB 1157, legislation that would fine landlords for knowingly renting to illegal immigrants, to the House floor (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS]). • An **ALABAMA** House panel endorses SB 226, which would require anyone 19 or older to prove he or she was lawfully in the country before getting most public benefits from a city, county or state agency. The proposal moves to the House floor (BIRMINGHAM NEWS).

**SOCIAL POLICY:** The **MICHIGAN** Supreme Court rules that public employers are barred from providing health care benefits to the partners of gay and lesbian employees. The ruling does not impact private companies (DETROIT FREE PRESS). • A **LOUISIANA** House committee endorses HB 1295, which would repeal a Pelican State law that requires motorcyclists to wear a helmet while riding. The measure moves to the full House (NEWS STAR [MONROE]).

**POTPOURRI:** Lawmakers in **HAWAII** approve HB 2557, legislation that would enact a shield law to protect journalists from being forced to reveal their sources, notes and video recordings to the government. The proposal would apply to any reporter who has ever worked for a newspaper, magazine, news agency, radio station or television station, as well as online writers if they hold a similar job as traditional journalists and regularly publish news in the public interest. The measure moves to Gov. Linda Lingle (R) for review (HONOLULU STAR BULLETIN). • The **CALIFORNIA** Assembly endorses AB 2233, which would bar drivers from holding a live animal in their lap. It moves to the Senate (SACRAMENTO BEE). • The **ILLINOIS** House unanimously approves HB 4844, legislation that would bar Prairie State animal shelters from using lethal gas to euthanize stray animals. Gas would still be allowed to use gas in order to put down violent animals. The measure moves to the Senate (ST. LOUIS POST DISPATCH).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

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# Once around the statehouse lightly

**R**EALLY WRONG NUMBER: OREGON Secretary of State Bill Bradbury really wants people who need help with questions about the state’s May 20 primary to call his office for help. But, as the *Oregonian* reports, he just doesn’t want them to call the toll-free number listed in the state voter guide. That’s because rather than providing details on polling sites or other such pertinent information, the number listed there offers only “an exciting new way to go live one on one with hot...girls.” Bradbury says the whole thing is just a foul up caused by some rather lax editing in the pamphlet’s production, which resulted in the number of a phone sex hotline being substituted for the real voter info line. All of which gives a whole new meaning to the term Beaver State.

**A SIMPLE SOLUTION:** CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger can never be accused of thinking small. During a press conference to announce that a private foundation was setting up a \$70 million endowment for the state’s community college system, Schwarzenegger recalled his own time learning English at Santa Monica Community College, by bestowing major kudos on the school for helping him along his path to success. But Schwarzenegger also acknowledged that at least one other major life event — his marriage to Maria Shriver — played a part in his becoming who he is today. “People always ask me ‘What is the secret of your success?’ I always say, ‘Come to America. Go to community college. And marry a Kennedy. It’s all very simple.’” If only they taught courses in how to do that...

**SPEAKING OF THE GOVERNATOR...**Some Golden State lawmakers aren’t real thrilled with him these days. Schwarzenegger recently took a potshot at lawmakers from small rural districts, saying it is good for those from “little towns” to get out more to see the amenities of big city life, such as “an airport” or a “highway that has 10 lanes.” As the *Sacramento Bee* reports, state Sen. Dean Florez, who comes from a Central Valley town of 14,000 people, sarcastically responded by asking, “Does the governor think that I just normally fly up on ‘crop dusters’ to Sacramento field by field?” In retaliation, Florez last week introduced Senate Resolution 28, which calls on the governor to immediately take and pass the high school exit exam, and to step down from office if he fails. No word yet from Arnold on whether we can expect to see him filling in bubbles on a Scan-Tron sheet any time soon.



**CALLING ON THE BIG DOG:** Sketchy dog breeders in PENNSYLVANIA beware — Oprah Winfrey is on your case. As the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reports, Gov. Ed Rendell recently asked Winfrey, a noted dog lover, to solicit support for legislation he is proposing to crack down on abuses in the Keystone State’s puppy mills. The gov made the pitch after Winfrey’s television show highlighted some of those abuses. A good cause, for sure, but you have to give Rendell credit for having the guts to hit Winfrey up for a favor. Rendell is, after all, a vocal Hillary Clinton supporter who has gotten himself into hot water more than once for saying incendiary things about Barack Obama — who counts Winfrey among his biggest backers. In the end, Winfrey’s pooch affinity trumped any potential political discord as she read portions of Rendell’s letter during her show and urged her viewers to support his proposals. She did, however, generally avoid saying his name, mostly referring to him only as “the governor.”

— *By RICH EHISEN*



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