

May 17, 2010

The Big Spill



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The next issue of
Capitol Journal will be
available on May 24th.

Top Story

*The massive oil spill
in the Gulf of Mexico
is far from being
under control, but
forces around the
country are already
acting to cut off plans
to expand future
offshore oil drilling.*

SNCJ Spotlight

States struggle with impact of Gulf oil spill

Although the massive oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico is not yet close to containment, the race to cut off future domestic offshore oil drilling has already begun.

The process started almost two weeks ago when the U.S. Department of Interior froze a proposal to allow drilling in waters off of VIRGINIA. That was followed last Tuesday by FLORIDA Gov. Charlie Crist, a former Republican newly re-minted as a political independent, announcing he will call a special session of the Sunshine State Legislature to ask voters to endorse a

constitutional amendment banning oil drilling off the state's coast. He also hopes to revive legislation promoting renewable energy.

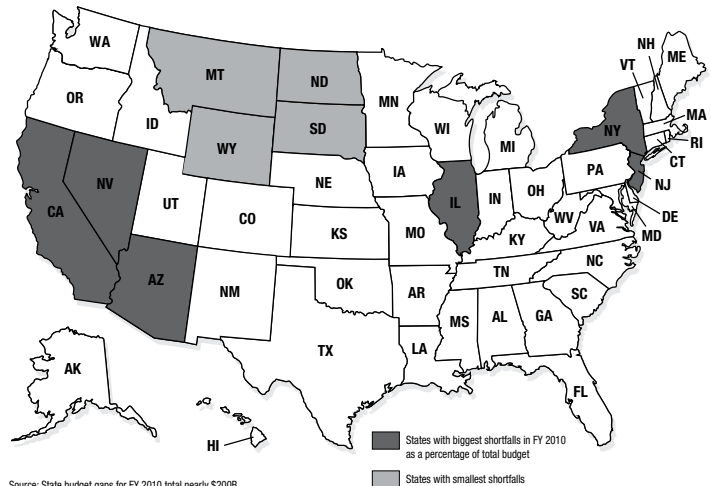
The big spill, which is dumping an estimated 200,000 gallons of oil each day into the Gulf, also inspired a rapid change in a long-delayed federal energy and climate bill. In its original form, the measure's sponsors, MASSACHUSETTS Sen. John Kerry (D) and CONNECTICUT Sen. Joe Lieberman (I), called for tax incentives that would have greatly encouraged expansion of deep-water offshore oil drilling in domestic waters. But that quickly changed after the April 20th explosion at the British Petroleum Deepwater Horizon oil rig. The version introduced last Wednesday not only does not have

the incentives, it would allow states to have veto power over oil drilling projects — even those not in their state waters — if they can show they would suffer significant economic and environmental impact from a similar disaster.

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Drilling in West Coast state waters is currently considered highly unlikely no matter what Congress does. President Obama has already indicated there are no federal plans to expand drilling there, and all three state governors now oppose it.

Bird's eye view



State budget gaps for FY 2010 total nearly \$200B

States have faced a combined \$196 billion in budget gaps this fiscal year, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. CALIFORNIA's total deficit is the largest both in terms of dollars (\$52 billion) and as a percentage of the state budget (56.5 percent).

NEW YORK's shortfall is the second biggest in dollars (\$21 billion), but ARIZONA's, at \$5.1 billion, is No. 2 as a percentage of budget (52.2 percent). Only two states haven't reported budget gaps for the year: MONTANA and NORTH DAKOTA.



That measure was followed on Thursday with the introduction of another Congressional proposal, this one by CALIFORNIA Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, both Democrats, to permanently ban offshore oil drilling in federal waters off the coasts of CALIFORNIA, OREGON AND WASHINGTON. The measure would only apply to drilling outside of the states' territorial waters. Boxer has since said she would consider attaching the bill to the Kerry-Lieberman legislation.

CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) made it a trio last week when he announced his opposition to a proposed project near Santa Barbara. Schwarzenegger originally supported the project, but changed his mind after the Gulf disaster.

Back in FLORIDA, Crist's proposal drew a harsh reaction from Republican legislative leaders like House Speaker Larry Cretul, who called it a "political ploy to promote the future of politicians." Incoming Speaker Dean Cannon (R) also took a shot at Crist, saying, "State and federal law already prohibits oil drilling off of Florida's shores, and lifting the ban will be off the table while I am speaker, so a special session to address it is unwarranted."

But Crist has not stopped there. He has also put together a team of legal heavy hitters with an eye on the possibility the state may eventually find itself in a brawl with BP over the clean up costs related to the spill. Former state Attorneys General Bob Butterworth and Jim Smith have agreed to give free advice to Crist and current

AG Bill McCollum on what the state must do to prepare a case against BP. State leaders are hopeful that can be avoided — McCollum has noted that the oil giant has repeatedly said it will pay every damage claim filed by both government and individuals for lost revenues, business

and environmental costs and "err on the side of granting the claim" when they are disputed — but McCollum also said he is "not confident" the state will ultimately avoid going to court.

That promise may be put to the test sooner rather than later. Although the spill has yet to hit Sunshine State beaches, state officials say a growing belief that the state's pristine beaches will soon be covered in tar balls have caused tourism to nosedive. Although BP has already agreed to spend \$500,000 on an ad campaign to promote the Gulf Region, Crist has asked the company to fork over \$35 million, around \$25 million to pay for a nationwide advertising blitz and another \$10 to help impacted Gulf counties.

"You don't have to twist my arm. I'm twisting theirs," Crist said.

To their credit, BP has to date not shied away from its promise. ALABAMA Gov. Bob Riley (R) and state officials asked Gulf Coast county leaders for lists of their most important needs and best ideas to prevent oil from making landfall, and on May 7th the governor announced that the company would spend \$25 million to fund those solutions. Riley says officials will use the BP money to pay for the supplies and manpower to put the best ideas into practice as early as this week. Time has become a major factor there, as tar balls began washing up on ALABAMA shores last Wednesday.

Meanwhile, LOUISIANA is also dealing with the spill's economic impact, which has seen both a minor boom as well as a significant bust across different industries. While the charter fishing business has taken a serious hit, hotels that may otherwise be empty are instead thriving, filled with hordes of cleanup crews and reporters in the areas to cover the event. And while many of the fishermen have been able to supplant their charter losses by leasing their boats out for the cleanup effort, the sudden and

"You don't have to twist my arm. I'm twisting theirs."

Budget & taxes

CASH-STRAPPED STATES BANK ON VICE: Up until very recently, efforts to expand gambling in OHIO haven't fared well. Initiatives seeking authorization for new casinos were rejected four separate times in the 1990s and 2000s. But in November, Ohioans voted to allow casinos. And Gov. Ted Strickland (D), long an opponent of gambling, proposed adding video lottery machines at the state's racetracks.

What has changed is the state has fallen on much tougher times. Its unemployment rate as of last month was 11 percent, the tenth-highest level in the nation. And last June, the state faced a \$3.2 billion budget shortfall that threatened crippling cuts to education, Medicaid and other public services.

"If I had not been confronted with these difficult circumstances, I would have obviously opposed expanding gambling in OHIO," Strickland said.

The Buckeye State isn't alone. With 38 states projecting budget shortfalls totaling \$89 billion for fiscal 2011 and 31 states expecting budget gaps of \$73.5 billion in 2012, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, similar reversals are taking place across the nation. About a dozen other states have either loosened restrictions on gambling or are considering doing so. And others have eased decades-long restrictions on Sunday liquor sales.

America has a long history of banking on vice in times of financial trouble, said David Laband, an Auburn University economics professor who studies the alcohol industry. "Blue laws," such as those restricting the sale of alcohol on Sundays, he said, frequently don't survive recessions.

"Every time there's an economic contraction, sure enough, you start seeing local repeal efforts," he said.

There are a couple of relatively new developments in the vice-taxing trend, however. CALIFORNIA lawmakers are considering legalizing and taxing Internet poker, even though federal law prohibits that form of gambling.

"It is generally easier to pass something like this in a recession," said Lloyd Levine, a political consultant assisting in the pro-poker effort who failed to get a similar initiative passed as a state assemblyman two years ago, before the economic crisis.

CALIFORNIA is also one of at least a half-dozen states weighing whether to legalize and tax the sale of marijuana. The Golden State has allowed the sale of pot for medicinal purposes since 1996, but lawmakers have avoided going any further, largely because of federal statutes outlawing the drug. This year, however, Assemblyman Tom Ammiano (D) introduced AB 390, a bill to legalize and tax pot as a way to reduce the state's then-\$40 billion budget shortfall. The measure has stalled in the Legislature, but a ballot initiative that would do much the same thing is slated for the state's November ballot.

Legislation that would legalize and tax pot is also pending in RHODE ISLAND. And Ocean State lawmakers are considering several measures that would decriminalize possession of marijuana in small amounts. The proposal has picked up some unexpected supporters, like Sen. Leo Blais (R), who opposed a bill five years ago that sought legalization of medical marijuana.

RHODE ISLAND Sen. Joshua Miller (D), who chaired a committee that examined the legalization of pot earlier this year, said that in better financial times the issue would have elicited “a reasonable discussion on the merits based on policy.” But given current budgetary pressures, he said, “people are measuring legislation this year on fiscal impact.” (WALL STREET JOURNAL)

WALL STREET EMBRACING CHARTER SCHOOLS: Supporters of charter schools in the state of NEW YORK have a powerful new ally: Wall Street. The founders of hedge funds like Anchorage Capital Partners, with \$8 billion in assets; Greenlight Capital, with \$6.8 billion; and Pershing Square Capital Management, with \$5.5 billion have been contributing generously to lawmakers, particularly Democrats who control both chambers of the Legislature, in the hope of creating a more favorable environment for charter schools. They’ve also raised millions of dollars for the more specific purpose of lobbying this month for legislation more than doubling the maximum number of charter schools in the state from 200 to 460.

The financial heavyweights’ sudden entry into charter-school politics evidently stems from a breakfast they had earlier this month with Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, which was arranged by Joe Williams, executive director of Democrats for Education Reform, a political action committee the

financiers all support. Cuomo was undoubtedly seeking donors for his all-but-certain gubernatorial run. And while his spokesman declined to comment about the breakfast, Williams was a little less tight-lipped.

Upcoming elections

5/13/2010 - 6/3/2010

05/18/2010

Arkansas Primary Election

House (All)

Senate 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 34, 35

Constitutional Officers:

Governor, Lieutenant Governor,

Secretary of State, Treasurer,

Attorney General, Auditor,

Commissioner of State Lands

US House (All)

US Senate

Kentucky Primary Election

House (All)

Senate (Even)

US House (All)

US Senate

Massachusetts Special Primary

House 16th Essex

Oregon Primary Election

House (All)

Senate 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24, 26

Constitutional Officers:

Governor, Superintendent of Public

Instruction, Commissioner of

Labor and Industries

US House (All)

US Senate

Pennsylvania Primary Election

House (All)

Senate (Even)

Constitutional Officers:

Governor, Lieutenant Governor

US House (All)

US Senate

Pennsylvania Special Election

House Districts 20, 138 and 147

US House (PA Congressional District 12)

05/22/2010

Hawaii Special Election

US House (HI Congressional District 1)

(continues on next page)

“We said we were looking for a leader on our particular issue,” he said, and as a result of the meeting, the next time the attorney general is required to disclose his contributors, “You will see a bunch of our people on the filing.”

The people to whom Williams is referring wouldn't seem to be the most natural champions of charter schools. They generally send their children to private schools, while charter schools typically serve poor, minority students. However, the financiers have reportedly been drawn by the businesslike manner in which many of the schools are run, including their focus on measured results. The fact that the city's leading billionaire, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, is a strong charter school supporter probably doesn't hurt either.

The financial titans' support of the cause through Williams' PAC poses a direct challenge to the state's teachers unions, which have traditionally opposed charter schools — not only because they aren't usually unionized but also because they receive taxpayer money that might have gone to public schools instead — and which have long had the backing of Democratic lawmakers. And the charter supporters may be making a difference. Two weeks ago, a bill raising the cap on charter schools (SB 7678) passed the Senate by a 3-to-1 margin.

But Assemblyman Sam Hoyt (D), who supports charter schools, said even with the financiers' backing, his side is at a disadvantage.

“Compared to the resources that the teachers union has, it's not enough,” he said. “Some big-shot millionaire is not going to go ring doorbells and get hundreds of people in a phone bank.” (NEW YORK TIMES)

BUDGETS IN BRIEF: The **KANSAS** Legislature just barely approved a \$314 million state sales tax increase (AB 2360) and a \$13.6 billion budget (SB 572) last week. Both measures went to Gov. Mark Parkinson (D), who has indicated he supports them (LAWRENCE JOURNAL WORLD). • A U.S. district court judge issued a temporary restraining order barring **NEW YORK** Gov. David Paterson (D) from implementing his plan for one-day-a-week furloughs to help close the

Upcoming elections (cont.)

5/13/2010 - 6/3/2010

05/25/2010

Idaho Primary Election

House (All)

Senate (All)

Constitutional Officers:

Governor, Lieutenant Governor,

Secretary of State,

Treasurer, Attorney General, Controller,

Superintendent of Public Instruction

US House (All)

US Senate

05/29/2010

Louisiana Special Runoff

House Districts 63 and 93

06/01/2010

Alabama Primary Election

House (All)

Senate (All)

Constitutional Officers:

Governor, Lieutenant Governor,

Secretary of State,

Treasurer, Attorney General, Auditor,

Commissioner of Agriculture & Industries

US House (All)

US Senate

Mississippi Primary Election

US House (All)

New Mexico Primary Election

House (All)

Constitutional Officers:

Governor, Lieutenant Governor,

Secretary of State,

Treasurer, Attorney General, Auditor,

Commissioner of Public Lands

US House (All)



state's \$9.2 billion deficit (ALBANY TIMES UNION).

• The **MINNESOTA** Legislature approved SB 2918, an overhaul of the state's public employee pension plans last week that would require workers and governments to boost contributions and cut retiree benefits. Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R) is expected to veto the legislation, contending its reforms didn't go far enough and would add to the state's long-term deficit (MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE, ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS). • **NEW**

JERSEY Gov. Chris Christie (R) unveiled a bundle of proposals last week aimed at resolving the state's property-tax crisis. The legislative package, centered around a constitutional amendment (ACR 131/SCR 104) that would place a 2.5 percent cap on municipal, school and county property tax levies, came minutes after Democratic legislative leaders proposed reinstating an income-tax surcharge on wealthy residents (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER). • Some of **NEVADA's** largest corporations, including Harrah's and Southern California Edison, have sued the state to recoup \$358 million in taxes and interest they paid on comped casino meals, corporate jets and coal used in power plants in the state that they allege should not have been taxed (LAS VEGAS SUN).

Upcoming stories

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

- **Texting and sexting**
- **More immigration reform**
- **Budget updates**

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

Politics & leadership

MAINE GOP ALIGNS WITH 'TEA PARTY': Delegates at the state Republican convention in MAINE this month rejected a proposed party platform upholding general conservative ideals and instead adopted a much more specific platform echoing key principles of the "Tea Party" movement. While the traditional GOP themes of small government and states' rights are still present in the party's new official platform, it also advocates, among other things, denying benefits and citizenship to individuals who enter the country illegally, treating health care as "a service" instead of a right and eliminating both the Department of Education and the Federal Reserve.

State GOP chairman Charlie Webster dismissed the notion that the change of platform was a "big deal." The delegates opted for the alternative proposal, he said, simply because they wanted a more specific platform.

"Maybe not every single phrase, but this generally represents what most MAINE Republicans and MAINE's working class support," he said.

Longtime GOP activist Mary Adams, who served on the subcommittee that drafted the original platform proposal and introduced it at the convention, said the



try to close a \$9.2 billion budget gap. He pushed for the furlough the day after state employee unions rejected his request to give back a 4 percent pay hike they had negotiated for this year.

But federal judge Lawrence Kahn ruled last Tuesday that the resulting 20 percent pay cut would impose “irreparable harm” to the affected workers. Kahn also noted

“Until we go to court, the state workforce will not be making any sacrifice in our budget reduction plan, and that’s unfortunate.”

claims from unions and some Democratic lawmakers that the furloughs were illegal because they had not been collectively bargained. Paterson was disappointed but promised to continue fighting for the furloughs.

“Until we go to court, the state workforce will not be making any sacrifice

in our budget reduction plan, and that’s unfortunate,” he said.

Things got worse the next day for Paterson, as he yielded to pressure to rescind \$42,000 in raises that had been set aside for five members of his staff. He defended the raises as “modest increases” for people who had taken on significant new responsibilities, but said they had become “a distraction” in his struggle with public employee unions over the furloughs. Paterson also railed against the unions, predicting they were prepared to “bleed this issue for weeks” so the public would hear only “about five workers who got increases pursuant to a promotion instead of 100,000 workers who haven’t given a dime toward our workforce reductions.”

Judge Kahn set a new hearing date of May 26th to hear the full dispute. (NEW YORK TIMES, ALBANY TIMES-UNION, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

PATRICK RAILS AGAINST AZ IMMIGRATION BILL: MASSACHUSETTS Gov. Deval Patrick (D) sharply criticized ARIZONA’s new immigration law (SB 1070) last week, saying its supporters, including his re-election opponents, are “trying to

invent a villain for political purposes.”

“Let me be clear: As long as I have anything to say about it, there’s not going to be an ARIZONA law in MASSACHUSETTS.”

“Let me be clear: As long as I have anything to say about it, there’s not going to be an ARIZONA law in MASSACHUSETTS,” he said. “I can’t see such a thing passing our Legislature. But if it did, I would veto it.”

Patrick, however, said he does not support calls from some people for the Bay State to follow the Boston City Council’s lead and divest from ARIZONA. Several other Bay State cities and towns are considering similar measures. Patrick was less committed regarding calls to boycott travel to ARIZONA, saying “people can make their own judgments.”



The governor also questioned the motives of those behind a measure barring public benefits for illegal immigrants that made a strong showing in the House last month. Patrick said such bills are “about demonizing people,” and said the state already has a “whole host of screens” to ensure services are given only to those who are eligible. He further accused his opponents in the fall gubernatorial election — independent Timothy P. Cahill and Republican Charles D. Baker, who both supported the bill — of political grandstanding.

Both men defended their support, with the Baker camp noting that 59 Democrats supported the bill, which fell by a narrow 82-75 decision. Cahill also lashed back at Patrick, saying he was “not trying to play on anyone’s fears.”

“I’m just trying to enforce the law and put legal residents ahead of illegal residents. I don’t think there’s anything unfair about that,” he added. (BOSTON GLOBE)

CRIST OFFICIALLY DUMPS GOP, REJECTS

REFUNDS: FLORIDA Gov. Charlie Crist officially dropped out of the Republican party last week, changing his voter registration to “no party affiliation” to match his U.S. Senate bid. He also just said no to calls for him to return campaign funds he gathered while still running as a Republican. Crist currently has \$7.6 million in his campaign coffers, almost double the on-hand funds of GOP challenger Marco Rubio and leading Dem Kendrick Meek. Crist campaign spokesperson Michelle Todd released the news that her boss would not be sending back the funds, saying, “[Donors] donated to the Charlie Crist for U.S. Senate campaign and it’s still the Charlie Crist for U.S. Senate campaign.” (MIAMI HERALD)

GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: The White House said last week that WASHINGTON Gov. Christine Gregoire (D) is being considered to replace Elena Kagan as the U.S. Solicitor General. Kagan was recently nominated by President Obama to the Supreme Court. Gregoire’s office did not say whether she would accept the job if it was offered (SEATTLE TIMES). • **TEXAS** Gov. Rick Perry (R) released a five-year strategic plan outlining the state’s “high-level roadmap” to deal with natural disasters, disease outbreaks, terrorist attacks, gangs and violence along the Mexican

The week in session

States in Regular Session: CA, DC, LA, MA, MI, MN, NC, NH, NY, OH, OK, PR, RI, SC, TN, US

States in Recess: IL, KS, PA

States in Special Session: CA “f”, WV “a”

Special Sessions in Recess: PA “a”

Upcoming Special Sessions: CT “a” regarding Citizens’ Election Program projected for 05/20/2010. KY “a” regarding The Budget convenes 05/24/2010. FL “a” regarding Public Corruption - TBA. VT “b” regarding Budget Reduction Review - TBA - July.

States in Budget Hearings: NJ

States in Joint Finance Hearings: DE

States Currently Prefiling or Drafting for 2011: KY, MT, ND

States Projected to Adjourn: MN

States Adjourned in 2010: AK, AL, AR, AZ, CO, CT, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KY, MD, ME, MO, MS, NE, NM, SD, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY

State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2010: AZ “a”, AZ “b”, CA “e”, CA “h”, MS “a”, NM “a”, NV “b”, OR “a”, TN “a”, WA “a”, WI “b”

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS
(session information current as of 5/7/2010)
Source: State Net database

border. Perry said the plan would focus on investigating and prosecuting gangs, coordinating intelligence and enhancing public-private partnerships for security (SAN ANTONIO NEWS). • **ALASKA** Gov. Sean Parnell (R) signed SB 309, a package of tax incentives designed to spur new oil and gas exploration in Cook Inlet. The bill increases the corporate income tax credits for capital investments in Cook Inlet gas production from 10 percent to 25 percent and allows offsets up to 75 percent of the tax liability, up from the current 50 percent (ALASKA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE). • **VIRGINIA** Gov. Bob McDonnell (R) asked the Federal Highway Administration for permission to impose tolls on Interstate 95 near the Old Dominion's border with **NORTH CAROLINA**. Under the proposal, tolls of \$1 to \$2 per axle would be assessed on northbound and southbound vehicles on the highway. The FHA did not say when the state could expect a response to the request (VIRGINIAN-PILOT [NORFOLK]). • **WISCONSIN** Gov. Jim Doyle (D) signed a package of bills that create or grow a wide array of state tax incentives and loans designed to spur companies to expand or relocate to the Badger State (LACROSSE TRIBUNE).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

Hot issues

BUSINESS: **ARIZONA** Gov. Jan Brewer (R) signs HB 2143, which would allow Grand Canyon State alcohol retailers to restock or sell liquor between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m. on Sundays, the same as what is currently allowed on weekdays (ARIZONA CAPITOL TIMES [PHOENIX]). • Still in **ARIZONA**, Brewer also signs HB 2617, a bill that speeds the permitting of mines and requires that state laws governing mining aren't stricter than federal laws without the Legislature's approval (ARIZONA DAILY STAR [TUCSON]). • The **OHIO** House approves HB 486, which would prohibit Buckeye State payday lenders from issuing checks and then charging customers to cash them. The bill also would limit origination and credit-check fees on loans of \$1,000 or less to once every 90 days. The measure is now in the Senate (COLUMBUS DISPATCH). • **MINNESOTA** Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R) signs SB 3055, legislation that requires dissolvable tobacco products that are candy-flavored and resemble mints and breath strips to be taxed and regulated as tobacco. The measure also requires tobacco products to be kept behind retail counters and bars the sale of electronic cigarettes to juveniles (ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS). • **FLORIDA** Gov. Charlie Crist (R) signs HB 885, a bill that, among other things, bars the creation or permitting of specified classes of employees for group health insurance policy purposes and preserves employers' authority to require plan participation as a condition of employment (STATE NET). • Also in **FLORIDA**,



Board. The bill also creates a penalty for issuing and using a false academic credential and/or the false use of a legitimate academic credential (WISCONSIN GOVERNOR'S OFFICE). • Still in **WISCONSIN**, Doyle signs SB 154, which requires local school districts and the state to adopt a plan to combat school bullying (WISCONSIN GOVERNOR'S OFFICE).

ENVIRONMENT: The **DELAWARE** House endorses SB 234, a bill that would require private or municipal government waste haulers to offer recycling pickup for all single-family home customers by Sept. 15, 2011. It moves to Gov. Jack Markell (D), who is expected to sign it into law (NEWS JOURNAL [NEW CASTLE-WILMINGTON]).

HEALTH & SCIENCE: The **LOUISIANA** Senate approves SB 348, which would ban smoking in all Pelican State casinos and bars. It moves to the House for debate (THE ADVOCATE [BATON ROUGE]). • **MINNESOTA** Gov. Tim Pawlenty (D) vetoes SB 915, a bill that would have created a statewide health insurance pool for school employees and teachers, and required all state school districts to obtain health coverage through the pool if they don't offer their own insurance. Pawlenty, who previously vetoed similar measures in 2007 and 2008, said he was concerned about the long-term costs of insuring retirees (BUSINESS WEEK). • **WISCONSIN** Gov. Jim Doyle (D) signs AB 779, a bill that allows nonprofits to apply for and receive federal money to pay for creating a statewide electronic medical records system. The state is due to receive \$9.4 million in federal stimulus dollars to pay for the system (LACROSSE TRIBUNE).

SOCIAL POLICY: The **LOUISIANA** House unanimously approves HB 1370, which would grant Pelican State health officials the authority to immediately close abortion clinics that do not comply with federal or state standards. It is now with the Senate (NEW ORLEANS TIMES-PICAYUNE). • **ARIZONA** Gov. Jan Brewer (R) signs SB 1306, a bill that bans the purchase or sale of a human embryo for any reason other than the treatment or study of infertility. Brewer also signs SB 1307, which prohibits the use of human embryos to create "human-animal hybrids" (ARIZONA CAPITOL TIMES [PHOENIX]). • Still in **ARIZONA**, Brewer signs SB 1309, the "Parents Bill of Rights," which specifies that parents have the final say over their children's education, health care and religious upbringing (ARIZONA CAPITOL TIMES [PHOENIX]). • **WISCONSIN** Gov. Jim Doyle (D) signs SB 44, a bill that requires gun dealers to request a state check of the mental health histories of handgun buyers before making a sale (MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL).

POTPOURRI: The **KANSAS** House approves SB 300, which would ban drivers from sending or receiving cell phone text messages while behind the wheel. The measure, which would also require minors to wear protective equipment



while riding a motorcycle, returns to the Senate (WICHITA EAGLE). • The **NEW JERSEY** Supreme Court rules that news reports reflecting a “full, fair and accurate” account of court complaints have absolute protection from defamation lawsuits. The ruling reverses part of an appeals decision that said the media were not protected by the “fair report privilege” in reporting on initial pleadings in which no judicial action has been taken if the allegations turned out to be untrue (NEWARK STAR-LEDGER). • **HAWAII** Gov. Linda Lingle (R) signs SB 2937, the so-called “birther bill,” legislation that allows any state agency to ignore repeated requests for information from the same person if the department already has responded within a year (HONOLULU ADVERTISER). • A **TENNESSEE** House panel kills HB 262, Senate-approved legislation that would have required Volunteer State driver’s license tests be given in English only (MEMPHIS COMMERCIAL APPEAL).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

Once around the statehouse lightly

NOT THAT WE’RE BITTER: It has been over a year since ILLINOIS lawmakers gave former Gov. Rod Blagojevich the boot, but they are clearly still seething over the impeached gov’s shenanigans. As the *Chicago Tribune* reports, the Prairie State Legislature recently endorsed HB 5109, a bill that would bar the use of state funds to pay for an impeached and convicted governor’s official state portrait. The measure doesn’t, however, prohibit said gubernatorial scoundrel from paying for it from his or her own pocket. The bill received only one nay vote as it cleared the Senate last week, with Sen. Mike Jacobs frumping that it was “frivolous” and that lawmakers were ignoring the state’s massive budget deficit. The final verdict rests now with Gov. Pat Quinn.

GOVERNOR WISEACRE: Don’t count CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger among the supporters of ARIZONA’s tough new immigration law. Schwarzenegger, who famously came to America from his native Austria many decades ago, has gone on record as saying he would never support a similar measure in the Golden State. As the *Sacramento Bee* reports, he also reveled in taking a crack at the new law last week during a graduation speech he was giving at Emory University in Atlanta, GEORGIA. “I was also going to give a graduation speech in ARIZONA this weekend,” Schwarzenegger said. “But with my accent I was afraid they would try to deport me.” Ba-da-boom!



NOW WHO DO WE QUOTE? Last week marked a farewell to one of the nation’s most esteemed unelected political figures. After 38 years at Sacramento State, Dr. Barbara O’Connor has decided to hang it up. Officially a media communications professor, O’Connor is better known for providing insightful and pithy political commentary on CALIFORNIA politics for reporters from just about every news organization in the nation, including this one. If you have read a newspaper, listened to the radio or watched TV on a Golden State election night, you have been witness to her observations. The irrepressible O’Connor was no slouch as a teacher either, sending scores of former students into the political arena, from newsrooms and statehouses to the hallowed halls of Congress. Not surprisingly, her departure was feted with resolutions from both the CALIFORNIA Legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives. And, we’re guessing, a toast from grateful scribes across the nation.

At Issue in the States
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FOOT IN MOUTH: Politicians around the globe are renowned for the keen ability to stick a foot in their mouth. But for New Zealand Prime Minister John Key, joking about literal toe-nibbling has earned him some serious grief. As the Associated Press reports, Key recently noted an ongoing kerfuffle with the Tuhoe tribe, a part of the once-cannibalistic Maori tribe, over negotiations to settle their grievances over land confiscations by European settlers in the 19th century. Speaking to a tourism conference, Key joked that he had just dined with the neighboring Ngati Porou, adding it was better than dining with the Tuhoe because “I would have been dinner.” The comment, an allusion to the Maori’s history of eating vanquished enemies, did not go over well with Tuhoe negotiators, who said they were “astounded.” A member of the Key administration called the joke “not wise.”

— *By RICH EHISEN*

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