

Tax Relief



June 4, 2007

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The next issue of Capitol Journal will be available on June 11th.

Top Story

The real estate boom did more than raise housing prices — it also brought a steep hike in property taxes. Now with housing markets on the decline, states are working to bring those taxes in check.

SNCJ Spotlight

Florida takes lead on property-tax relief

When the real estate market was booming not long ago and home prices were on the rise across the country, property tax bills were climbing along with them. Now that the market has cooled, states are beginning to look for ways to relieve homeowners of that lingering burden. And FLORIDA, which was at the leading edge of both the former boom and the current bust, is about to take the lead in that relief effort as well.

According to the U.S. Commerce Department, the average annual property-tax burden nationwide increased 13 percent between 2000 and 2005, to \$1,132 per person. Property tax bills for residents of WYOMING actually shot up 49 percent over that period, while bills in NEW JERSEY reached an average of \$2,206 per household.

Homeowners have been letting their elected representatives know they're not happy about that state of affairs, and state lawmakers have begun to respond. INDIANA, MONTANA, NEW JERSEY, and NEW YORK have all instituted property tax cuts of some kind this year. And PENNSYLVANIA did so last year.

But none of those measures compares in either size or scope to what may soon be coming in FLORIDA. The Sunshine State Legislature is

planning to hold a special session

this month to consider over \$30 billion in property-tax relief over the next several years. "This is the biggest tax break being considered anywhere since Proposition 13 in CALIFORNIA," said David Brunori,

a professor of public policy at George Washington University, who is also vice president of the nonprofit tax-information company Tax Analysts.

It isn't just tax cuts FLORIDA lawmakers will be looking at. They'll also be mulling over whether to change the structure of the state's property tax system. The current

system — much like CALIFORNIA's — protects existing homeowners by restricting the amount their taxes can increase each year. So, those who don't enjoy that protection, such as new home

buyers, business owners, and people with vacation homes in the state, have borne the tax burden of the more than doubling in home prices in the state since 2000.

Those property owners paid 68 percent of the total property taxes collected by the state last year, according to the Legislature's Joint Select Committee on Property-Tax Reform. Some residents are actually paying twice as much or more than neighbors with similar homes. House Minority Leader Dan Gelber (D), for instance, said that if he moved across the street in his Miami Beach neighborhood, into a virtually identical home, his property tax bill would go from \$7,000 a year to over \$20,000. "People are just getting hammered," he said.

The week in session

States in Regular Session: CA, DC, IL, LA, MA, ME, MI, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OH, OR, PA, RI, US, WI

States in Budget Hearing Recess: DE

States Currently Prefiling or Drafting: FL, FL "b", KY

States Projected to Adjourn: AL, AZ, CT, NE, NV, SC, TN

States Adjourned in 2007: AK, AR, CO, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KS, KY, MD, MN, MS, MT, ND, NM, OK, SD, TX, UT, VA, VT, WA, WV, WY

State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2007: AL "a", FL "a", MS "a", MT "a", NM "a", WI "a", WV "a"

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS
(session information current as of 06/01/2007)
Source: State Net database

"This is the biggest tax break being considered anywhere since Proposition 13 in CALIFORNIA."

"People are just getting hammered."

One group that is pushing for property-tax reform is the state's real estate agents, who believe it could provide a boost to their slumping business by spurring longtime homeowners who have been reluctant to give up their favored status to enter the market. "I think it would cause a second boom," said Craig Beggins, president of a real-estate agency based in Tampa Bay.

Another strong supporter of reform is FLORIDA Gov. Charlie Crist (R), who believes that providing homeowners with more money to spend would be good for the state as a whole. "We can send a sonic boom through FLORIDA's economy," he said at a recent town-hall meeting on property taxes. "We must provide relief to Floridians."

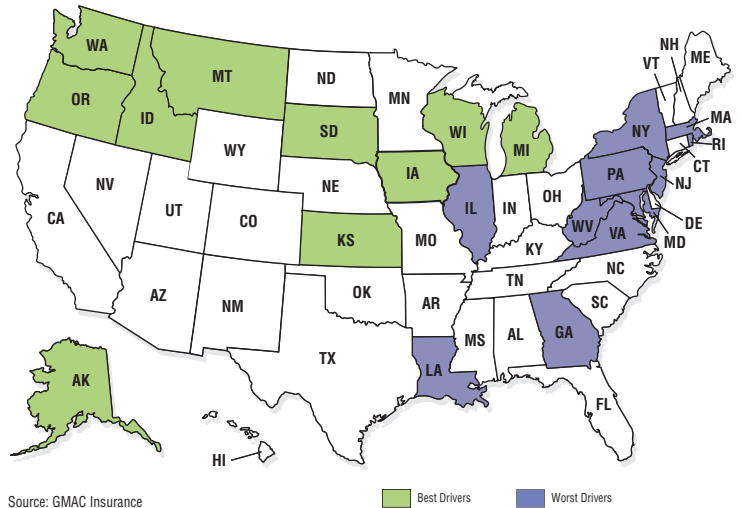
But while the state's economy is expanding right now, there are signs of trouble ahead. Housing starts in the last quarter of 2006 were down by nearly half from the year before. And Goldman Sachs has estimated that FLORIDA homes are still overvalued by more than 40 percent and prices could fall 15 percent this year alone. On top of that, a drought is currently

"We can send a sonic boom through FLORIDA's economy."

threatening the state's agriculture and the hurricane season officially began this month.

Consequently, some are skeptical about the potential impact of a tax break, particularly if the looming negatives tip FLORIDA's economy into a recession. "It definitely will help," said the Legislature's chief economist, Amy Baker. "But it's not likely to spur economic revival." (WALL STREET JOURNAL)

Bird's eye view



The best and worst drivers



At some point or another, most of us have shared a highway with drivers that seemed utterly clueless about even the most basic rules of the road. In fact, according to results from GMAC Insurance's third annual national driver survey, one out of every six drivers — approximately 36 million people — would fail the written portion of their state's driving test. GMAC quizzed more than 5,000 drivers (at least 100 from each state), posing 20 questions culled from driver's exams from across the country. Based on the answers given, NEW YORK has the least knowledgeable drivers in the U.S. New Yorkers garnered an average score of only 71, barely above the minimum passing score of 70 and well below the national average of 77.1. IDAHO ranked at the top of the list with an average of score of just over 87.

— Compiled by KOREY CLARK

Budget & taxes

GOVNS CALL FOR FEDERAL ACTION ON GAS PRICES: Two weeks ago, a bipartisan group of 21 governors sent a letter to Congress calling for an investigation into the record-high prices of gasoline across the nation. “We are beyond frustrated. We are angry. We want answers as to why prices at the pump continue to escalate in the absence of new seasonal, weather or world events,” railed CONNECTICUT Gov. M. Jodi Rell, one of the six Republican signatories of the dispatch to Capitol Hill.

A number of states carried out investigations of gas prices following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but those probes generally resulted in out-of-court settlements of \$10,000 or less with individual retailers. One notable exception was the \$373,000 price-fixing settlement NEW JERSEY obtained from oil company Amerada Hess Corp. Oil industry executives have blamed the price spike on refinery issues, including the need to conduct routine maintenance, which they say are limiting gas supplies.

But that defense only seems to further rile Gov. Rell, who said, “it makes no apparent sense to shut down refineries for maintenance as the summer driving season approaches.” In taking their grievance to Congress, however, Rell and her fellow governors may just be preaching to the choir. A spokesman for U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D) said the House is not only conducting hearings on the subject, but has also passed bills subjecting the 14 oil-exporting companies of OPEC to U.S. antitrust laws and imposing penalties for price-gouging. (STATELINE.ORG)

STATES CONSIDER COMPENSATION FOR WRONGFULLY ACCUSED: The increasing prevalence — and publicity — of DNA exonerations are prompting states to try to compensate those imprisoned for crimes they did not commit. About 45 percent of the 200 men who have been exonerated on the basis of DNA evidence so far have received compensation ranging from \$25,000 to \$12.2 million, according to the Innocence Project at Yeshiva University’s Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. That’s largely because 21 states and the federal government have standardized compensation laws in place. Another 13 states have introduced compensation-related legislation, including TEXAS, which is considering raising its compensation level from \$25,000 per year of incarceration to \$50,000, and VERMONT, which passed a comprehensive measure that not only provides compensation for the wrongfully incarcerated but gives

“We are beyond frustrated. We are angry. We want answers as to why prices at the pump continue to escalate in the absence of new seasonal, weather or world events.”



them access to healthcare and reintegration services as well. That is something the Innocence Project believes there needs to be more of, pointing out that most exonerees aren't even eligible for the services parolees get. "In FLORIDA, if you're a parolee they give you \$100 and a bus ticket,"

said Michael Olenick, a Tallahassee attorney who represented a man cleared of rape and kidnapping charges by DNA evidence last year after

spending 24 years in a FLORIDA prison. That man — Alan Crotzer — Olenick said, "got no bus ticket, and no \$100." (CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR)

"In FLORIDA, if you're a parolee they give you \$100 and a bus ticket."

CORRECTION: In our 5/21 issue, we referenced a NEBRASKA bill that would permit public power districts to work with private developers and landowners to build wind farms and collect federal incentives for alternative energy production. Unfortunately, we gave the incorrect bill number. The correct bill is LB 629, not LB 659 as we stated. We regret the error.

BUDGETS IN BRIEF: Researchers at the University of ALASKA at Anchorage announced at a climate change conference last week that damage to buildings, roads, pipelines and other public infrastructure due to global warming could cost the state between \$5 billion and \$10 billion over the next few decades. Resource economist Peter Larsen said the damage would result from the melting of the permafrost layer that covers about two-thirds of the state (REUTERS, USA TODAY). • The CALIFORNIA-based watchdog group MAPLight.org released the results of a study last week alleging that high levels of donations by payday lenders to officials in seven states — IDAHO, ILLINOIS, KANSAS, SOUTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, TEXAS and UTAH — may have allowed the industry to avoid "significant restrictions" in those states. Lenders say the study is neither scholarly nor well-documented (DESERET MORNING NEWS [SALT LAKE CITY]). • MINNESOTA Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R) vetoed a tax bill that would have provided \$88 million in aid to local governments and \$33 million in property tax rebates to low- and middle-income homeowners. The governor reportedly vetoed the measure because it contained a provision requiring inflation to be factored into budget calculations for expenses as well as revenues (ST. CLOUD TIMES). • IOWA and KANSAS are teaming up to offer the nation's first multi-state scratch lottery game. The game — called "Midwest Millions" — will be launched in both states on September 10 (DES MOINES REGISTER). • For the second year in a row, NEW YORK led the nation in per-student public school spending, according to the latest census data. The Empire State spent \$14,119 per student, followed by NEW JERSEY, which spent \$13,800 per student, and VERMONT, which spent \$11,838. The states that spent the least were UTAH (\$5,257), ARIZONA (\$6,281) and IDAHO (\$6,283) (NEW YORK TIMES).

— Compiled by KOREY CLARK

Politics & leadership

SPEAKER CRADDICK SURVIVES SESSION: TEXAS House Speaker Tom Craddick (R) managed to hold on to his post through the end of the '07 session — just barely. But he could still effectively find himself out of that job before the start of the next regular session in 2009, if things don't go his way in the '08 legislative elections. After surviving a challenge to his election to a third term as speaker at the start of the session in January, Craddick faced another coup attempt in the session's closing days last month, when his opponents in the chamber attempted to make a motion for his removal. He dodged that bullet by refusing to recognize those members and then by preventing the chamber from voting on whether to override his action. But with every House seat up for grabs next year, and both Craddick's conservative allies and his enemies — particularly trial lawyers, whose interests have been thwarted under his speakership — expected to pour big money into key races, his immediate future will depend on who's actually sitting in the House seats come January '09. "To Tom Craddick, freshmen are like oxygen," said one of his critics. "He needs them to survive." (HOUSTON CHRONICLE)

"To Tom Craddick, freshmen are like oxygen. He needs them to survive."

NJ LOOKS TO END DUAL OFFICEHOLDING TRADITION: Since at least the 1960s, NEW JERSEY state lawmakers have been allowed to hold another elective office while serving in the Legislature. But that could soon change if, as expected, the Assembly approves and Gov. Jon S. Corzine (D) signs legislation banning that practice, which was passed by the Senate a couple of weeks ago. While most state constitutions explicitly prohibit dual officeholding, the practice is just as clearly permitted in ALABAMA, IOWA, MAINE, MISSISSIPPI and NEVADA, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. NEW JERSEY's Constitution is actually mum on the subject, but it has more dual officeholders serving in its legislature — 19 of them — than any of the five aforementioned states that specifically allow them. And some, including Gov. Corzine, believe the practice doesn't help the Garden State's reputation on ethics much. But at least one dual officeholder, Senator and Mayor of Bayonne Joseph Doria (D) — who's planning to retire from the Legislature — expressed opposition to the ban. "I moved from the Legislature to the municipal post, and coming in I thought that I knew everything about municipal government because I had been in the Legislature," he said. "Well, I didn't. Now I have more of an understanding, and I think it is good to have the ability to blend knowledge of different levels of government." Alan Rosenthal, a political



science professor at Rutgers University, counters that politicians have the option of graduating from local office to the Legislature, which allows them to gain that experience without having to hold two offices. “I think for a lot of them it was a choice of convenience,” he said, adding that the ban sends a more positive message to the electorate. “It means now that one public office is enough to focus on.” (NEW YORK TIMES)

GENDER FEUD IN RI

STATEHOUSE: RHODE ISLAND

lawmakers — like those elsewhere — don’t seem to have any general aversion to naming public buildings after notable natives.

For instance, there’s the Clairborne Pell

Bridge in the town of Newport, named for a former U.S. senator, and the J. Joseph Garrahy Judicial Complex in Providence and John O. Pastore government complex in Cranston, named for former governors. But lawmakers in the Ocean State do appear a little reluctant to name a bridge after one particular former resident. Rep. Amy Rice (D) has been trying to get a new bridge spanning the Sakonnet River in southeastern Rhode Island named for Anne Hutchinson, the religious leader who founded one of the first settlements in the state. Last year, a bill Rice introduced to accomplish that objective was rewritten to give Hutchinson shared billing with Capt. Robert Gray (as in the Anne Hutchinson/Robert Gray Bridge), a Revolutionary War privateer, also known for discovering OREGON’s Columbia River and for being the first American to circumnavigate the globe. And Rice’s proposal is encountering resistance again this year. Some lawmakers say the problem is that

“For women, we’ve come a long way...but apparently not far enough.”

we’ve come a long way...but apparently not far enough.” The fact that Rice is one of only 15 women in the 75-member House and that there wasn’t even a women’s restroom in the chamber until a couple of months ago does suggest there might be something to her argument. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, BOSTON GLOBE)

Upcoming elections

(05/31/2007 - 06/21/2007)

06/05/2007

Florida Special Primary

House District 24
Senate District 3

New Hampshire Primary Special Election

House Merrimack District No. 9 (Hooksett)

06/12/2007

Maine Special Election

House Representative District 83

06/19/2007

Georgia Special Election

House Congressional District 10
Senate District 24

Rice is attempting to name a landmark that isn’t located in her own district. But she believes there’s another reason for the opposition to her measure. “This bill would have passed if it weren’t for gender politics,” she says. “For women,



POLITICS IN BRIEF: The **ALASKA** Legislature — which began the session under the specter of a federal investigation into the activities of several lawmakers — has passed an ethics bill requiring lobbyists to report any time they spend more than \$15 on food or drink for a legislator or staffer at a single meeting. The bill now awaits the signature of Gov. Sarah Palin (R) (**ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS**). • A Quinnipiac University poll conducted last month found that 51 percent of **PENNSYLVANIA** voters favor a smaller Legislature and 75 percent support term limits. The slightly better news for lawmakers was that only 49 percent of respondents statewide said they didn't approve of the job the Legislature was doing (**PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE**).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

Governors

GIBBONS STRUGGLES IN NV: Being a freshman governor is rarely easy, but you might have to forgive frosh **NEVADA** Gov. Jim Gibbons (R) if he didn't think it was going to be this hard either. A series of highly public gaffes since taking office coupled with some serious allegations of legal misconduct prior to his getting there have helped make Gibbons the least popular governor in the nation.

According to a recent Mason-Dixon poll of 625 registered Silver State voters, only 28 percent viewed Gibbons in a positive light, easily the lowest gubernatorial approval mark in the country. In contrast, another freshman governor, **ALASKA**'s Sarah Palin, also a Republican, has approval ratings hovering around 90 percent. It has become so bad for Gibbons that call for a recall has begun to pop up around the political blogosphere, creating enough buzz that the state's leading newspaper recently ran a column to address those possibilities. But while a recall is highly unlikely, Gibbons situation could get worse before it gets better.

Most observers agree that Gibbons's troubles have long been self created, and many actually started even before he narrowly defeated Democratic challenger and current state Sen. Dina Titus in last November's election. During that campaign, for instance, Gibbons was accused of assaulting a woman in a Las Vegas parking garage, a charge that was eventually dropped for lack of evidence. It was also brought out that Gibbons, a strong proponent of cracking down on illegal immigration, had previously hired an illegal immigrant to work for him as a nanny.

He survived those situations to win the election, but has since drawn harsh criticism for things like proposing a plan to bolster the state's fuel supply by turning coal into jet fuel — a significant challenge for a state that has virtually no coal of its own — and suggesting the government sell water rights under state highways, rights it does not actually own. The FBI has also since launched an investigation into

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GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) signed a deal last week with Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty that will see the province contribute \$30 million toward developing and funding a joint project for stem cell research. The two men also inked an agreement that will require the region to adopt the Golden State’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard, which is designed to reduce carbon content of all fuels sold in the state by 10 percent by the year 2020 (CANADIAN PRESS). • **MASSACHUSETTS** Gov. Deval Patrick (D) said last week he would place his finances into a blind trust to avoid potential conflicts of interest between those holdings and his official gubernatorial duties. Patrick holds stock in dozens of companies, many of which are either regulated by the state or could be affected by state legislation (BOSTON HERALD). • **VERMONT** Gov. Jim Douglas (R) vetoed legislation that would have placed limits on contributions per election as low as \$250 for those running for the state House. Candidates for higher offices would have been allowed to accept larger contributions. Douglas said the measure was too restrictive and could lead to “incumbent protection” (RUTLAND HERALD). • **ALABAMA** Gov. Bob Riley (R) signed a resolution last week that expresses “profound regret” for the state’s role in slavery. Riley called slavery an “evil” part of American history, but noted that he believes “all Alabamians are proud of the tremendous progress we have made and continue to make” (ASSOCIATED PRESS). • **KENTUCKY** Gov. Ernie Fletcher (R) easily won the Bluegrass State’s GOP gubernatorial primary, earning slightly better than half of the vote. Fletcher will face Lt. Gov. Steve Beshear (D) in November (COURIER-JOURNAL [LOUISVILLE]).

— Compiled by RICH EHISEN

Hot issues

BUSINESS: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that workers may not sue their employers for wage discrimination unless they have filed a formal complaint with a federal agency within 180 days after their pay was set. The ruling came in regard to an **ALABAMA** woman who sued her employer after almost 20 years on the job when she discovered that she was paid significantly less than all of her male co-workers (NEW YORK TIMES). • **IOWA** Gov. Chet Culver (D) signs legislation that allows cable TV and other video services providers to obtain a single statewide franchise license rather than being forced to negotiate individual deals with local governments (QUAD CITY TIMES [DAVENPORT]). • TV is also the issue in **GEORGIA**, where Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) signs legislation that similarly allows Peach State video providers to obtain a single statewide franchise license (MACON TELEGRAPH). • The **LOUISIANA** Senate approves SB 223, which would more

than double mandatory auto liability insurance limits in the Pelican State. The measure heads to the House (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS]). • A federal appeals court upholds a lower court’s ruling that **NEW HAMPSHIRE** consumer protection laws do not pre-empt regulations on terms and conditions of gift cards sold by national banks. The court ruled that such institutions are beholden only to federal regulators (NASHUA TELEGRAPH). • The **CALIFORNIA** Senate endorses SB 386, which would add “familial status” to the categories of discrimination banned by the state’s Fair Employment and Housing Act. The law would essentially bar employers from denying promotions or raises to workers who juggle job duties with the demands of caring for children, sick spouses or aging parents. It moves to the Assembly (LOS ANGELES TIMES).

CRIME & PUNISHMENT: The **CALIFORNIA** Assembly approves AB 1471, which would require all semiautomatic handguns sold in the Golden State to “microstamp” each bullet cartridge in two locations as a way to help police investigating crimes to identify a gun’s make, model and serial number. It shoots over to the Senate (SACRAMENTO BEE). • The **ILLINOIS** Legislature endorses a measure that would allow juvenile sex offenders convicted of misdemeanors to petition to be removed from the Prairie State juvenile sex offender registry after two years. Those convicted of felonies would be eligible to petition after five years. It moves to Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) for review (CHICAGO TRIBUNE). • The **NEW HAMPSHIRE** Senate rejects House-approved proposal that would have allowed a police officer to stop and ticket any driver for either not wearing a seatbelt or for carrying unbelted passengers. The Granite State is the only one in the nation to not require drivers to buckle up (UNION LEADER [MANCHESTER]).

EDUCATION: The **TEXAS** House approves legislation that would allow the state to test thousands of high school athletes for steroid use. The measure heads to Gov. Rick Perry (R), who has not indicated if he will sign it (HOUSTON CHRONICLE). • The **TEXAS** House also endorses HB 1287, legislation that would allow schools to teach courses on religion if 15 or more students sign up for such a class. It moves to Gov. Rick Perry (R) for review (HOUSTON CHRONICLE). • **NEBRASKA** Gov. Dave Heineman (R) signs LB 338, legislation that raises to \$5,000 per year the amount of money that Cornhusker State residents can place in a college savings account without paying state income taxes. The previous cap was \$1,000 (OMAHA WORLD-HERALD). • A **LOUISIANA** House committee endorses a proposal to bar teachers other school officials from having consensual sex with 17 and 18-year-old students. Current Pelican State law allows consensual relationships in schools if the students are older than 16. HB 586 now goes before the full House (ADVOCATE [BATON ROUGE]). • A **LOUISIANA** House committee later shoots down HB 461, which would have barred college students from bringing guns into university dorm rooms (ADVOCATE [BATON ROUGE]).



ENVIRONMENT: The **OREGON** Senate endorses HB 2626, which requires manufacturers of electronics to pay the cost of establishing free and convenient statewide recycling of computers, some computer equipment and televisions. It heads to Gov. Ted Kulongoski (D), who is expected to sign it (STATESMAN JOURNAL [SALEM]). • Saying the Golden State has not done enough on its own to meet its energy needs, **ARIZONA** regulators reject a plan to build a \$581 million cross-desert power transmission line to carry electricity generated at plants in the Grand Canyon State to customers in **CALIFORNIA**. Officials also contend that the 230-mile line would cause air pollution and harm bighorn sheep habitat (SAN DIEGO UNION TRIBUNE).

HEALTH & SCIENCE: The **CALIFORNIA** Assembly approves AB 105, which would bar anyone under 18 from getting an ultraviolet tan at a tanning salon without parental permission. It moves to the Senate (SACRAMENTO BEE). • Still in the Golden State, the **CALIFORNIA** Assembly rejects AB 1108, which would have barred the use of products intended for children under age 3 that contain phthalates, a toxic chemical used to soften and smooth plastics. Supporters said the chemical can lead to early puberty, reproduction defects and other health problems (SACRAMENTO BEE). • And still in **CALIFORNIA**, the Senate approves SB 120, which would require all chain restaurants with 10 or more outlets to list the amount of fat, sodium, carbohydrates and total calories in each of its food items. The measure moves to the Assembly (SACRAMENTO BEE). • **COLORADO** Gov. Bill Ritter signs SB 231, which establishes a program to distribute donated unused cancer drugs to uninsured and under-insured cancer patients (ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS [DENVER]). • The **ILLINOIS** House approves SB 937, which would require insurance carriers to cover a controversial new vaccine against the human papillomavirus (HPV), which has been linked to cervical cancer. The measure now goes to Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) for review (ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH).

IMMIGRATION: **GEORGIA** Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) vetoes legislation that would have increased penalties for driving without a valid Peach State driver's license and required state officials to run a check on the nationality of violators (MACON TELEGRAPH).

SOCIAL POLICY: **IOWA** Gov. Chet Culver (D) signs legislation that makes it illegal to discriminate in employment, public accommodation, credit, housing or education based on a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The law goes into effect July 1 (DES MOINES REGISTER). • **NEW HAMPSHIRE** Gov. John Lynch (D) signs legislation that makes the Granite State the fourth in the country to legalize

Upcoming stories

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

- **Hiring illegal workers**
- **Predatory lending**
- **Credit scoring**



same-sex civil unions. It goes into effect on January 1, 2008 (UNION LEADER [MANCHESTER]).

POTPOURRI: The **CALIFORNIA** Senate approves SB 880, which makes it legal to import goods made of kangaroo leather. The measure would maintain the Golden State’s current ban on goods made from kangaroo species that are considered to be endangered. It hops over to the Assembly (SACRAMENTO BEE). • The **ARIZONA** House approves SB 1251, legislation that requires public building owners or operators who ban guns from the premises to provide a secure place on site to store the weapons. It fires off to Gov. Janet Napolitano (D) for review (ARIZONA REPUBLIC [PHOENIX]). • The **NEBRASKA** Legislature approves LB 97, which would add colleges, universities and hospitals to the list of places where concealed weapons automatically would be prohibited. The measure fires off to Gov. Dave Heineman (R) for review (OMAHA WORLD-HERALD). • The **NEW HAMPSHIRE** Supreme Court rules that being found mentally incompetent to stand trial does not necessarily make that person too incompetent to possess guns. The court determined that the standards for being found incompetent to stand trial are different from the federal legal standard for being declared too mentally defective to have guns (FOSTER’S DAILY DEMOCRAT [DOVER]).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

Once around the statehouse lightly

YOU NEEDED A LAW FOR THIS? One of the more obvious canons of entering the teaching profession would seem to be not to do inappropriate things with or to your students. But clearly not everyone manning school grounds in LOUISIANA gets that. As noted by the *Advocate* in Baton Rouge, Pelican State lawmakers last week took up a proposal that would bar educators from having consensual sexual relations with their charges. While current law bans teacher-student relations if the child is 16 or younger, all systems are apparently go once the youngster hits 17. According to the bill’s author, Republican Rep. Brett Geymann, the issue of teachers, coaches and other school personnel having relationships with high school juniors and seniors is “becoming a very prevalent problem.” Calcasieu Parish District Attorney John DeRosier, who co-wrote the measure, said this type of thing could be an issue because “We don’t want people in authority over students... to exercise that authority inappropriately.” Uh, you mean by doing things like, say, having sex with them?



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