

# Plastic Pariah?



June 9, 2008

<b>Budget &amp; taxes</b> Gas prices squeezing cities	<b>5</b>
<b>Politics &amp; leadership</b> Political reforms bring mixed results in CT	<b>8</b>
<b>Governors</b> Govs highlight VP selection process	<b>9</b>
<b>Bird's eye view</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Hot issues</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Once around the statehouse lightly</b>	<b>13</b>

● The next issue of Capitol Journal will be available on June 16th.

## Top Story

*Plastic bags, once considered an environmentally friendly alternative to chopping down trees to make paper ones, have become an ecological nightmare. Now states are aggressively looking to turn retailers and shoppers to other options.*

## SNCJ Spotlight

### States grab hold of plastic bag problem

**P**aper or plastic? It's hard to imagine a trip to the grocery store that doesn't involve hearing those words. But they may actually be on the way out. A number of states are seeking to eliminate one of the two options. And at least one state is attempting to rule out both.

Plastic bags, once considered an environmentally friendly alternative to chopping down trees to make paper ones, have become an ecological nightmare. Americans use an estimated 100 billion of the bags each year. They require nearly 12 million barrels of oil to produce and, after a single





Other critics charge that AB 2058 is a tax on consumers that doesn't address the core problem with plastic bags.

"The problem is that people need to stop littering," said Assemblyman Rick Keene (R). "That's the behavior we need to go after."

Assemblyman Levine, however, said his bill is designed to reduce the number of plastic bags that enter the waste stream, and the measure allows stores to avoid having to impose the fee by cutting their plastic bag use 70 percent.

"It's not a tax, it's an avoidable fee that helps mitigate a serious problem in CALIFORNIA," he said.

He also pointed out that consumers are already effectively paying for the bags they use.

"Californians already spend \$450 million on plastic bags," he said. "It's just included in the cost of groceries."

Furthermore, Murray, of Californians Against Waste, said that although the state's recycling program — which his group helped set up — had doubled the number of plastic bags being recycled, that number represented only about 4 percent of the total used annually.

"I think it's inevitable, if we want to make a meaningful dent, that we have to become much more aggressive than we have been so far," he said.

And there's another problem with recycling. A good portion of the plastic bags returned to stores nationwide by conscientious shoppers end up at Winchester, VIRGINIA-based Trex, the largest purchaser of used plastic bags in the United States. The company converts about 1.5 billion plastic bags a year into composite decking. And while that means a lot less bags going into landfills and waterways, the bags aren't really being recycled, according to Carol Misseldine, sustainability coordinator for the city of Oakland, CALIFORNIA.

"They're being downcycled," Misseldine said, "meaning that they're being put into another product that itself can never be recycled."

Unlike glass bottles and aluminum cans, plastic bags are rarely turned into another plastic bag, because it's cheaper to just

make a new one, which is part of their appeal. They typically cost grocery stores less than 2 cents per bag, while paper bags cost them double that or more.

If AB 2058 does manage to become law, critics may find some encouragement in Ireland's experience with the plastic bag tax too, which also had its share of opponents.

"I spent many months arguing against this tax with the [environment] minister; I thought customers wouldn't accept it," said Ireland Senator Feargal Quinn, founder of Superquinn Market, the country's largest grocery chain.

**"It's not a tax, it's an avoidable fee that helps mitigate a serious problem in CALIFORNIA."**

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Quinn’s resistance stemmed from an experience he had a decade ago when his stores tried charging customers a cent for plastic bags. He said the customers rebelled, and he ended up buying bags for them to keep them from taking their business elsewhere. After five years of the bag tax, though, he said he’s become “a big, big enthusiast.”

(NEWSDAY, NEW YORK TIMES, SACRAMENTO BEE, SALON.COM, VENTURA COUNTY STAR, STATE NET)

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

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## Budget & taxes

**GAS PRICES SQUEEZING CITIES:** With gasoline prices sky-high and still rising, more and more people are leaving their cars at home and taking the bus or train to work.

In South FLORIDA, the Tri-Rail commuter line that runs between Miami, Fort Lauderdale and Palm Beach recently reported a 28-percent increase in ridership over a year before.

“During rush hour, we’re basically saying ‘Standing room only’ at this point,” said Tri-Rail spokeswoman Bonnie Arnold. “It’s definitely gas-price driven. You talk

to passengers, and they say, ‘It’s all about the gas.’”

**“It’s definitely gas-price driven. You talk to passengers, and they say, ‘It’s all about the gas.’”**

The increasing demand has city transportation officials scrambling to boost capacity.

Transit officials in Seattle, WASHINGTON, for instance, are planning to add three round-trip trains to nearby Tacoma to their daily schedule. Many of Washington, D.C.’s Metro trains will soon be expanded from six cars to eight. And New York City’s transportation agency is modernizing the subway’s antiquated signaling system to accommodate more trains in its underground tunnels.

At the same time that demand is pressuring cities to expand their mass-transit systems, higher fuel prices are driving up costs. In a recent survey by the American Public Transportation Association, transit officials reported that diesel prices had jumped from \$1.25 a gallon in 2004 to \$3.32, increasing the portion of their operating budgets devoted to fuel from an average of 6 percent to nearly 11 percent. That’s forced many of them to raise fares, put off planned service increases, and even cut back existing service, which transportation experts say is rather unfortunate.

“You’ve got a time in history where these agencies could be tapping a new market and attracting the suburban people who, heretofore, have been less likely to ride

[public transit],” said Stephen Reich, program director at the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

But for cities that have recently invested in major capital improvements to shift their commuter traffic from congested roads to more efficient, environmentally friendly mass transit, the rising gas prices have been a boon of sorts. The Seattle area’s Sound Transit, for example, is finishing up an ambitious expansion effort it started in 1996. And in 2006, ridership was only half of what had been predicted 10 years earlier. But the number of riders began increasing with the price of gas, and now it’s reportedly going “gangbusters.”

“You’ve got systems where heavy investments were made, and frankly, they were underutilized,” said Professor Reich. “So people are beginning to use that capacity, and that’s a great thing.”

Transit officials applaud those successes too. But they’re quick to point out that still only about 5 percent of Americans use public transportation regularly. (CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR)

#### **NH OVERHAULS RETIREMENT SYSTEM:**

After months of hard work and a week of difficult negotiations, NEW HAMPSHIRE lawmakers agreed on a plan last Tuesday to overhaul the state’s public employee retirement system, which, \$2.7 billion short on its long-term obligations and 37 percent underfunded, is among the worst-off in the country.

Lawmakers had numerous goals going into the process, including making sure the plan complied with the IRS code, avoiding a lawsuit cities and towns had threatened over healthcare costs, assisting low-income retirees and shaking up the NHRS board of trustees, which has helmed a decade of subpar investment

returns. The deal agreed upon last week would, among other things, cut projected 50-percent surges in retirement costs to around 15 percent, cap annual increases in a health subsidy some retirees receive at 4 percent, grant a 1.5 percent cost-of-living increase, divert \$250 million from a “special account” that funds cost-of-living adjustments to an underfunded health subsidy, and provide older retirees with

## Upcoming elections

06/04/2008 - 06/24/2008

06/10/2008

**Georgia Special Election Runoff**  
House District 093 (Sailor)

#### **Maine Primary Election**

House (All)  
Senate (All)  
US House (All)  
US Senate (Collins)

#### **North Dakota Primary Election**

House (Even)  
Senate (Even)  
US House (All)  
US Senate (All)  
Constitutional Officers: Governor,  
Lieutenant Governor,  
Treasurer, Auditor, Commissioner of  
Insurance, Superintendent of Public  
Instruction, Public Service Commissioner

#### **South Carolina Primary Election**

House (All)  
Senate (All)  
US House (All)  
US Senate (Graham)

#### **Virginia Primary Election**

US House (All)  
US Senate (Warner)

06/17/2008

**Maryland Special Election**  
US House (Albert Russell Wynn  
(4th district))

06/24/2008

#### **Utah Primary Election**

House (All)  
Senate 1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20,  
23, 24, 25, 27, 29  
US House (All)  
Constitutional Officers: Governor,  
Lieutenant Governor,  
Treasurer, Attorney General, Auditor

pensions less than \$20,000 a year a one-time \$500 or \$1,000 boost, depending on when they retired. In addition, the plan requires all future trustees to have experience in “finance or business management.”

Getting the deal done by last week’s final deadline was apparently touch and go at the finish. “I have to admit in the last few days, I wondered whether we had set the bar too high,” said House Speaker Terie Norelli (D). “I think what you’ve seen at the end was a real compromise.”

Gov. John Lynch (D) seemed pleased with the resulting bill, calling it “significant legislation that will help ensure the long-term security of the retirement system.” And even union representatives praised lawmakers for their effort. “I want to commend the House and the Senate for the extremely hard work, commitment and dedication,” said David Lang, president of the Professional Firefighters of New Hampshire. “What we saw was some laypeople sitting around the table really digging their arms and their hands and their fingers into this stuff.” (CONCORD MONITOR)

**BUDGETS IN BRIEF: MASSACHUSETTS** reduced its population of uninsured adults by nearly half in its first year under the mandatory insurance law passed in 2006, according to a study released last week by the Urban Institute. The state’s Revenue Department, meanwhile, reported that 86,000 people had opted to pay a tax penalty instead of buying insurance. Supporters of the new law said both reports were signs of success, indicating that more people are obtaining coverage and that only a fraction are contesting the state’s insurance mandate (NEW YORK TIMES, BOSTON GLOBE). • Last week, **GEORGIA** Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) put the breaks on a gas tax hike scheduled to take effect July 1, saying, “I don’t think we can justify raising taxes on gasoline in a time of economic stress for many families.” The action is expected to save most motorists about 3 cents a gallon (ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION). • On May 31, the last day of the **ILLINOIS** General Assembly’s spring session, lawmakers killed a \$34 billion casino expansion package that would have been the largest public works program in state history, and was Gov. Rod Blagojevich’s (D) chief legislative priority. Rep. Jack Franks (D) laid the blame for the casino plan’s failure squarely on the governor, saying: “Let’s put the blame where it belongs. The governor should have shown leadership. He should have been working on this. He should have been in Springfield, quite frankly, and because he wasn’t here, we didn’t get this done” (CHICAGO SUN-TIMES).

— Compiled by *KOREY CLARK*

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# Politics & leadership

**POLITICAL REFORMS BRING MIXED RESULTS IN CT:** Three years ago, in the aftermath of former Gov. John G. Rowland's conviction on corruption charges, CONNECTICUT Gov. M. Jodi Rell (R) and state lawmakers enacted sweeping legislation — which takes effect this year — designed to squeeze special interest money out of Constitution State politics and open up the process to competition. They've apparently accomplished their first objective. The lobbyists who contributed 80 percent of the \$2 million legislative candidates went through in 2006 have been barred from the process this election season.

But the reforms have done little to increase competition. In fact, the number of unopposed races has actually gone up since 2006. Democrats have no candidate in 15 of the state's 151 House districts, while Republicans are without a candidate in 43. Two years ago, those numbers were 12 and 31, respectively. As of last week, only two incumbents and one challenger had qualified for state grants under the new Citizens' Election Program. The problem may be that in order to qualify for a grant, which can range from \$7,500 to \$170,000, House candidates have to raise \$5,000 in small donations from 150 contributors, and Senate candidates have to raise \$15,000 from 300 donors. Or it could just be that the law is too new. "It's a new kind of politics. That, in a lot of ways, understates it," said Andy Sauer, executive director of CONNECTICUT Common Cause. "It's revolutionary. I think people are just beginning to comprehend it." (HARTFORD COURANT)

**POLITICS IN BRIEF:** Last Tuesday, CALIFORNIA Sen. Carole Migden (D) became the first sitting Golden State legislator in over a decade to lose a primary election. When all the votes in the San Francisco Bay area 3rd Senate District were counted, Assemblyman Mark Leno was declared the victor, with Migden actually finishing 3rd behind former Assemblyman Joe Nation. Migden was evidently weakened by a year of negative headlines, which included coverage of her being fined \$350,000 for campaign finance violations and pleading no contest to misdemeanor reckless driving in her state-owned SUV (SACRAMENTO BEE). • Also in CALIFORNIA, an initiative that would amend the state constitution to define marriage as "between a man and a woman" qualified last week for the November ballot. The measure's certification comes less than a month after the state Supreme Court overturned a state ban on gay marriage (SACRAMENTO BEE). • The ILLINOIS General Assembly unanimously passed legislation barring state contractors from contributing to the political campaigns of officeholders who approve their contracts, a clear shot at Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D), who has indicated he plans to rewrite parts of the measure. But the bill's primary House sponsor, Rep. John Frichey (D) has warned that any changes would spur an override effort (CHICAGO SUN-TIMES).

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# Governors

**G**OVNS HIGHLIGHT VP SELECTION PROCESS: With Barack Obama and John McCain all but secured as the respective Democratic and Republican presidential nominees, political observers have turned their speculative sights on who each man will choose as his vice presidential running mate. Based on early rumblings, the list includes no fewer than six current governors: For Obama, Democratic governors Kathleen Sebelius of KANSAS, Janet Napolitano of ARIZONA and Bill Richardson of NEW MEXICO, while McCain is thought to be considering FLORIDA Gov. Charlie Crist, MINNESOTA Gov. Tim Pawlenty and LOUISIANA Gov. Bobby Jindal. Last week, however, McCain indicated that Jindal is not likely to be his choice.

For now, most of the contenders are downplaying the VP talk while also being careful to avoid closing the door before it is officially opened. Crist, Jindal and former MASSACHUSETTS Gov. Mitt Romney all recently took great pains to portray a gathering at McCain's ARIZONA home as merely a social gathering rather than any vetting of possible running mates. But SOUTH CAROLINA Sen. Lindsey Graham (R), another attendee who is also in the VP mix, later admitted that there was "some vetting going on," though he said McCain did not conduct any formal interviews for the position.

Larry Gates, chairman of the KANSAS Democratic Party, said Sebelius hasn't been pursuing the vice presidency, though he doubts she would reject the opportunity if it came her way. "She's always been extremely interested in completing her term," Gates said, while adding that "No one could ever say 'no' to an invitation. She hasn't told me that, but I just think no one in her right mind could say no to that invitation, if offered."

While KANSAS Dems so far seem nonplussed at the potential for Sebelius to move on, the idea of Napolitano joining the Obama ticket has the ARIZONA Democratic Party a little more concerned. Under the Grand Canyon State constitution, Napolitano would have to resign her office to even run for the office, meaning Republican Secretary of State Jan Brewer would take over the governor's office. Democratic Sen. Ken Chevront said such an occurrence "would be devastating." Chevront said Napolitano has given ARIZONA Dems the mind of clout they never enjoyed under the two Republican governors who preceded Napolitano. "We were completely ostracized and made irrelevant," he said.

For her part, Napolitano has also deferred any commitment on her interest in joining the ticket, saying "I have an interest in being governor of ARIZONA. [Obama] will look, I'm sure, at a number of possibilities. The Democratic bench is a very deep one." (WASHINGTON POST)



**EXECUTIVE ORDERS:** CALIFORNIA Gov. ARNOLD Schwarzenegger (R) issues EO S-06-08, which declares a condition of statewide drought. Among many other things, the order directs state water officials to expedite the transfer of water into critically dry areas. It is the first such gubernatorial declaration in the Golden State since 1991, and comes after the driest spring the state has experienced in 88 years (STATE NET, SACRAMENTO BEE, CALIFORNIA OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR). • ALABAMA Gov. Bob Riley issues EO 12, a directive that establishes the ALABAMA Broadband Initiative (ABI), tasked with developing a plan to “extend the benefits of advanced broadband technology to every community in the state...” (STATE NET).

## Upcoming stories

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

- Nuclear power
- Prison health care
- No Child Left Behind

**GOVERNORS IN BRIEF:** An ILLINOIS court rules that Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) has the right to set the date and time of legislative special sessions. However, the court cautioned both the governor and House Speaker Dave Madigan (D) not to interpret the ruling as an advantage for either man in their ongoing feud. The court said calling a special session must still be done with a “high degree of reasonableness and cooperation” between the governor and legislative leaders (CHICAGO TRIBUNE). • COLORADO Gov. Bill Ritter (D) vetoed HB 1406, a bill that would have required paid signature-gatherers for candidates or ballot initiatives to be state residents and to be free of certain felony records. Ritter said the bill was likely unconstitutional (DENVER POST). • A NEW JERSEY court ruled that Gov. Jon Corzine (D) must make public hundreds of e-mails between himself and a state-worker union leader with whom he had a romantic relationship. The judge said the e-mails were public documents under the state’s Open Public Records Act. State Attorney General Anne Milgram said she would appeal the ruling (STAR-LEDGER NEWARK)]. • A federal court ruled that CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) was within his rights to declare a state of emergency at the state’s overcrowded prisons in 2006 and begin transferring inmates out of state. The state’s powerful prison guard union, which sued to block the transfers, said they would appeal the decision to the state Supreme Court. CALIFORNIA has transferred almost 4,000 prisoners to private out of state lockups since then. The Schwarzenegger administration said they may eventually send up to 8,000 inmates to those facilities (SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE). • Five NEW YORK state lawmakers filed suit last week to block an executive order from Gov. David Paterson (D) that directs state agencies to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other locales. The suit, which is backed by the ARIZONA-based conservative Christian policy group Alliance Defense Fund, argues that Paterson usurped the Legislature’s authority as the sole branch of Empire State government empowered to decide the state’s definition of marriage (NEW YORK TIMES).

— Compiled by RICH EHISEN

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# Hot issues

**B** **USINESS:** The **SOUTH CAROLINA** House approves legislation that grants tax incentives to property owners who voluntarily install sprinklers in their buildings. The measure moves to Gov. Mark Sanford (R) for review (GREENVILLE NEWS). • **OHIO** Gov. Ted Strickland (D) signs HB 545, which caps rates on short-term payday loans at 28 percent. Payday lenders are considering either a court challenge or a petition drive to put the matter before voters (CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER).

**CRIME & PUNISHMENT:** The **LOUISIANA** House unanimously endorses HB 726, which makes it a crime punishable by a \$5,000 fine and a year in jail to display a noose with the intention of intimidating others. It moves to the Senate (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS]). • Still in **LOUISIANA**, the House also unanimously supports HB 1243, which makes it a crime to steal copper from churches and cemeteries. Violators would face up to five years in jail and a \$5,000 fine. It heads to the Senate (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS]). • The **SOUTH CAROLINA** House and Senate approve a measure that would require magistrates to hold hearings for juveniles within 24 hours after they are arrested. It moves to Gov. Mark Sanford (R), who says he is likely to sign it into law (GREENVILLE NEWS). • The **ARIZONA** House approves HB 2643, which would mandate a 10-day jail sentence for first-time offenders convicted of operating a boat while drunk, and require those convicted of DUI to complete alcohol or other drug screening before their suspended license can be reinstated. It moves to the Senate (ARIZONA REPUBLIC [PHOENIX]). • **VIRGINIA** Gov. Tim Kaine (D) signs legislation that does away with a law that allowed men who sexually attack girls 14 to 16 years old to avoid criminal charges by offering to marry the victim (RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH).

**EDUCATION:** **FLORIDA** Gov. Charlie Crist (R) signs SB 610, which requires Sunshine State middle and elementary schools to offer students in grades 6 through 8 one class period per day of physical education for one semester (ST. PETERSBURG TIMES).

**ENVIRONMENT:** The **PENNSYLVANIA** House approves a final version of HB 1281, which would require towns along the Appalachian Trail to enact zoning to protect land abutting the historic footpath. More than 200 miles of the multi-state trail passes through the Keystone State. It moves to Gov. Ed Rendell (D), who is expected to sign it (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER).



**HEALTH & SCIENCE:** An **ILLINOIS** court upholds the state’s ban on smoking in public places. Challengers had sued to block the measure, contending it is unconstitutional (**CHICAGO TRIBUNE**).

• **COLORADO** Gov. Bill Ritter (D) signs HB 1372, legislation that expands eligibility for the state-run health care plan to include kids in families with incomes that are 225 percent above the federal poverty level. The old cutoff was 205 percent above the poverty line. Ritter also approved a bill that requires most health insurance plans to cover colorectal cancer screening tests (**ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS [DENVER]**).

• The **LOUISIANA** Senate endorses HB 370, legislation that bans government funding of somatic cell nuclear transfer, embryonic stem cell research more commonly known as “therapeutic cloning.” It moves back to the House for review of changes made in the Senate (**ADVOCATE [BATON ROUGE]**).

**IMMIGRATION:** Saying it is likely unconstitutional, a federal judge delays implementation of part of **OKLAHOMA** HB 1804, a 2007 measure that requires Sooner State employers to use the federal E-Verify database to confirm the legal employment eligibility of all their workers. Business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, have challenged the legislation, saying it places undue burdens on employers (**OKLAHOMAN [OKLAHOMA CITY]**).

• **SOUTH CAROLINA** Gov. Mark Sanford (R) signs HB 4400, legislation that also requires Palmetto State employers to use the federal database to verify that their employees are in the U.S. legally. Businesses who knowingly hire illegal workers face a loss of their operating license, and legal workers replaced by an illegal worker will be able to sue their former employer. The new measure also makes it a felony to harbor or transport illegal immigrants and bans illegal immigrants from attending public colleges and paying in-state rates for private colleges (**STATE [COLUMBIA]**).

**SOCIAL POLICY:** The **CALIFORNIA** Supreme Court declines to delay the effective date of its recent ruling that declared same-sex marriage constitutional in the Golden State. Religious groups and the attorneys general of 10 states had asked the court to stay its ruling until November when voters weigh in on a proposed constitutional amendment that would define marriage as being only between one man and one woman. The court’s ruling will allow same-sex couples to legally wed

## In the hopper

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

**Number of prefiles last week:** 55

**Number of Intros last week:** 574

**Number of bills enacted/adopted last week:** 646

**Number of prefiles to date:** 20,061

**Number of Intros to date:** 82,476

**Number of bills enacted/adopted overall to date:** 20,188

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(measures current as of 06/04/2008)  
Source: State Net database



starting on June 17 (LOS ANGELES TIMES). • A **WISCONSIN** judge upholds the constitutionality of a state law banning same-sex marriage and unions “similar to that of marriage for unmarried individuals.” The court rejected a claim that the 2006 voter-approved measure violated the state’s single-subject requirement (MILWAUKEE JOURNAL-SENTINEL).

## In case you missed it

In recent years, states have increasingly turned to gambling revenues to bolster state coffers. As we noted in the June 2 issue of SNCJ, states are expanding their reliance on gambling by betting big on racetrack casinos to help pump up their bottom line.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at

[http://www.statenet.com/capitol\\_journal/06-02-2008/html](http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/06-02-2008/html)

**POTPOURRI:** The **MICHIGAN** House approves HB 4749, legislation that would repeal the Wolverine State law that requires motorcycle riders to wear a helmet. Under the proposal, riders who have passed a motorcycle safety course and been licensed for two previous years could go sans the protective head gear. The bill moves to Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D), who is expected to veto it (DETROIT FREE PRESS). • **VIRGINIA** Gov. Tim Kaine (D) signs HB 538, which, among other things, requires Old Dominion dog breeders to obtain a local business license, breed female dogs only between the ages of 18 months and 8 years, cooperate with inspections by animal control officers and maintain no more than 50 dogs over the age of one year at one time unless given local approval (STATE NET). • The **OHIO** Supreme Court rules that next-of-kin have no legal right to the removed internal organs of a loved one after an autopsy. The decision came as part of a federal class action lawsuit against 87 of the Buckeye State’s 88 county coroners (DAYTON DAILY NEWS).

— Compiled by *RICH EHISEN*

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# Once around the statehouse lightly

**O** **PEN MOUTH, INSERT FOOT:** That is just what vice president Dick Cheney did last week. The veep was speaking to the National Press Club in Washington D.C. when he noted that his wife’s genealogical research showed that he “had Cheney’s on both sides of the family tree.” But as the *Washington Post* reports, Cheney didn’t stop there, adding “And we don’t even live in WEST VIRGINIA.” The audience reaction was a mix of laughter and groans, prompting him to note that, “You can say those things when you’re not running for re-election.” As one might expect, Mountain State folks — Democrat and Republican alike — found no humor in Cheney’s stand-up act. Long-time U.S. Sen. Robert Byrd,

a Democratic, said the comments showed “astounding ignorance,” while Rep. Shelley Moore Capito, a Republican, called them “disrespectful...and certainly not funny.” Gov. Joe Manchin demanded an apology, which Cheney’s office quickly offered up.

**MOW OR GO...TO JAIL:** For the last four-plus decades, Canton, OHIO has been known primarily as the home of the NFL Hall of Fame. But Canton may soon be better known for a city ordinance that lays a big hit on residents who don’t keep their own gridiron neat and tidy. As the Associated Press reports, Canton already levies a \$150 fine on those who don’t keep their lawns mowed. But last week the city threw a full-on blitz at the issue by approving a measure that makes a second high-grass violation a fourth-degree misdemeanor, which imposes a \$250 fine and up to 30 days in jail. Canton Mayor William J. Healy II says the city spends about \$250,000 annually to mow neglected private lots, making the measure “the type of action we need to take in order to clean up our neighborhoods and our city.” Or to run grass-growing scofflaws out of town.

**IDLE HANDS:** Anyone with a car or a commute knows that gas prices have gone through the roof of late. But ARIZONA Rep. Sam Crump says the gas crunch is also making legislation more expensive. As the *Arizona Republic* reports, Grand Canyon State legislative leaders are currently tied up with their annual wrangling over the state budget, leaving rank-and-file House lawmakers to spend a lot of time doing little or nothing. To Crump, that means a lot of lawmakers using a lot of gas to get somewhere where they are accomplishing very little. According to his figuring, it takes roughly one gallon of gas for every 1.5 bills lawmakers have passed this year. A clearly irritated Crump says, “I think we really have to start carpooling.”

**HANGING CHADS STILL HANGING AROUND:** Although the 2008 presidential election is nearly upon us, folks are still bonking heads over the chaotic and, to some, notorious 2000 FLORIDA election that ultimately put George W. Bush in the White House. As the *Miami Herald* notes, a tussle is underway over the infamous “hanging chad” ballots, which are boxed up at the state archives in Tallahassee. Secretary of State Kurt Browning would love to ditch the 5,000 boxes in order to free up over 4,000 feet of warehouse space. But even though there is no way to ever do an accurate recount — two counties destroyed their ballots before they could be sent to the archives — others say they should be preserved for history. Browning says he probably won’t do anything with them for now, conceding that it would look bad if a “Republican secretary of state is doing away with ballots that elected a Republican president.”

— By RICH EHISEN



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