

December 6, 2010

Revenue Recovery?



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The next issue of
Capitol Journal will be
available on December 13th.

Top Story

Just a year ago state revenue prospects were bad and getting worse. Now, in spite of the ongoing economic slump, things are looking up.

SNCJ Spotlight

State revenues edging up

A year ago state revenues were in free fall, wiping out budget forecasts and forcing repeated rounds of spending cuts. Governors were drafting budget proposals for fiscal 2011 that projected nearly \$100 billion in cuts and tax increases.

But state tax collections have been rising in many states (see *Bird's eye view*), due largely to higher sales tax collections. In California, sales tax receipts have been trending up for four straight months, reaching 13.1 percent in October. Oklahoma is also seeing double digit gains (14 percent). And



On top of having to play catch up, states face the unyielding spending pressures of Medicaid, education, public pensions and corrections.

“It’s like a tornado coming through. You don’t rebuild overnight,” said Utah budget director John Nixon.

At least one governor is so optimistic about the current revenue trend, however, that he’s considering a tax cut. Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe (D), who’s already persuaded lawmakers to reduce the state sales tax on food from 6 percent to 2 percent, said if revenues continue to exceed forecasts he may propose an even deeper cut. (STATELINE.ORG, DESERET NEWS [SALT LAKE CITY])

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

Budget & taxes

STATES DIPPING INTO ‘GREEN’ MONEY: Just over two years ago, 10 Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states agreed to cap carbon dioxide emissions from electric power plants and charge the plants for the emissions they generate, while letting them cut their emissions below the cap and sell or trade the excess carbon allowances through online auctions four times a year. Since then, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) has raised over \$729 million for the participating states.

The states are supposed to use that money to invest in renewable energy, promote energy efficiency and provide energy assistance programs to consumers. But some states have used it for other purposes. New York, for instance, diverted \$90 million of its \$265 million share to deal with a projected \$50 billion budget deficit through March 2013. And New Jersey repurposed its entire share — \$65 million — to help close a \$10.7 billion budget hole for fiscal year 2011.

“This is nothing but a new form of taxation, and environmentalists have been used.”

Peter Iwanowicz, New York Gov. David Paterson’s (D) environmental adviser and acting commissioner of the State Department of Environmental Conservation, called his state’s action “a one-time deal.”

“New York was facing historic deficits,” he said. “It wasn’t a decision that was made lightly.”

Administrators of the system say that even with the state diversions, about 80 percent of the proceeds from carbon credit auctions has still gone toward designated programs.

Critics, however, say that the diversion of money for general spending makes RGGI little more than a hidden tax on electricity.



“This is nothing but a new form of taxation, and environmentalists have been used,” said Steve Lonegan, New Jersey state director for Americans for Prosperity, a conservative group backed by oil industry interests.

Efforts by the Obama administration and Congressional Democrats to include a cap-and-trade system as part of a national energy policy were, likewise, resisted by opponents who branded it “cap-and-tax.”

Even some environmentalists who support RGGI agree that without investment in programs that reduce energy use and create green jobs, the initiative has a negative economic impact.

“There’s a direct consequence for taking this money,” said Jeff Tittel, director of the Sierra Club’s New Jersey chapter. “Families are going to pay higher energy bills this winter if they didn’t weatherize their homes.”

Still, states’ use of RGGI money to help them deal with their fiscal woes may be the very thing that saves the initiative.

“The states are so broke that it’s going to be unbelievably difficult for them to stop this program,” said Leigh Raymond, associate director of Purdue University’s Climate Change Research Center. “They’re desperate for money.” (NEW YORK TIMES)

BUDGETS IN BRIEF: A White House-appointed deficit reduction commission has called for an end to tax free status for new municipal bonds. The recommendation raises the possibility of higher borrowing costs for states and cities, and lower appeal for investors, who look to the bonds as a reliable and tax-favored investment option (WALL STREET JOURNAL). • **OREGON** Gov. Ted Kulongoski (D) proposed a two-year budget last week that would close a projected \$3.5 billion hole by restraining employee compensation, including health care benefits and pensions (STATESMAN JOURNAL [SALEM]). • **ALASKA** officials said last week that if oil prices hold steady, the state could have a \$5 billion surplus in annual income through 2012. North Slope crude prices of \$77.96 and \$82.67 per barrel in fiscal year 2011 and 2012, respectively, could collectively funnel more than \$11 billion in “unrestricted” revenue into state coffers (ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS). • **NEVADA**’s Economic Forum estimated last week that the state will have \$1 billion less than forecast for the current two-year spending cycle. Despite that news, Gov.-elect Brian Sandoval (R) said he will not raise taxes (LAS VEGAS REVIEW

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: 1,172

Number of Intros last week: 301

Number of Enacted/Adopted last week: 239

Number of 2010 Prefiles to date: 20,240

Number of 2011 Prefiles to date: 5,058

Number of 2010 Intros to date: 93,300

Number of 2010 Session Enacted/Adopted overall to date: 30,852

Number of bills currently in State Net Database: 93,801

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS
(measures current as of 12/2/2010)
Source: State Net database



JOURNAL). • **MICHIGAN** Gov.-elect Rick Snyder (R) has gone outside his state's borders to fill his cabinet post of budget director. John Nixon, **UTAH's** budget director since 2006, will be the lead architect of Snyder's ambitious plan to overhaul state government, close a projected \$1.6 billion budget deficit and cut business taxes by more than \$1 billion a year (DETROIT FREE PRESS). • Total state spending nationwide for fiscal 2011, which for most states began July 1, rose 5.3 percent to \$645.1 billion from the year before, according to a report from the National Governors Association and the National Association of State Budget Officers (WALL STREET JOURNAL). • **NEW JERSEY** will file a federal lawsuit challenging the U.S. government's \$271 million bill for work it funded on the rail tunnel to Manhattan project which the state canceled last month (ASBURY PARK PRESS).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

Politics & leadership

PARTY SWITCHERS ADD TO GOP'S ELECTION VICTORIES: The Republican Party won 690 state legislative seats on Nov. 2, the largest number since 1966, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. But the GOP has picked up 13 more seats in five states since Election Day through the defection of lawmakers from the Democratic Party. And more could be on the way.

Two weeks ago, four Democrats in Alabama announced they were joining the GOP, giving Republicans a supermajority in the House. The defection of a Democrat from New Orleans turned control of Louisiana's House over to Republicans for the first time since Reconstruction. Six Democratic state legislators in Georgia — five in the House and one in the Senate — have switched allegiance since the election. A Democratic House member in Maine and a Democratic senator in South Dakota have also switched parties.

With most of the party flips coming in the South, where GOP rule is becoming more entrenched, Democrats there face what looks like a lengthy exile in the minority. The GOP pickups in Georgia, for instance, come after the party's sweeping victories in every statewide race last month brought, in the words of one of the defectors, state Rep. Alan Powell, "an effective end, at least for the foreseeable future, to the two-party system in state government."

Powell, who served in Georgia's House as a Democrat for two decades before joining the Republican caucus last month, concluded the switch would allow him to be a player on key issues again. The 58-year-old real estate agent has been openly critical of both parties and expects to maintain an independent bent in the GOP.

Other party switchers say the national Democratic Party has shifted left, and they've found themselves more in line with the GOP's political ideology. The Democratic Party has abandoned them, they say, not the other way around.

"The Maine Democratic agenda is too focused on the bidding of various special interests," said state Rep. Michael Willette, who joined the GOP less than two weeks after being elected as a Democrat.

The current surge of Democratic defections undoubtedly has something to do with the scale of the Republicans' election victories and, consequently, may not be over.

"This was a wave election," said NCSL's Tim Storey. "So you will probably see that wave continue with even more Democrats moving over as the impact of the election settles in." (ASSOCIATED PRESS, CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER)

YEAR OF THE ROOKIE LAWMAKER: Next year, 60 of the 110 members of Michigan's House of Representatives will be newcomers, with no state legislative experience at all, and over 90 percent of the members will have only two years' experience or less. Twenty-nine of the state Senate's 38 members will also be new (although the majority have served in the lower chamber), the highest turnover in a single legislative chamber in 50 years, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The record turnover — the result of term limits as well as voter dissatisfaction — in a year in which the rebellious Tea Party became a national sensation has some political observers wondering what will happen next session when so many political novices suddenly find themselves with so much political power.

"It's almost impossible to forecast," said Craig Ruff, a political consultant in Lansing. But he said it could make for some interesting political theater, with first-termers potentially resisting being shepherded by legislative leaders.

"It's much harder to enforce discipline when people aren't accustomed to being disciplined," Ruff said, adding that some new lawmakers just might take the view: "I've got one vote. You've got one vote. What makes you so supreme?"

With turnover in state legislatures hovering around 25 percent nationwide, which Tim Storey at the National Conference of State Legislatures says is an "extraordinarily high" number in a non-redistricting year, such scenarios may play out in many state capitols.

In Arkansas, 44 of the state's 100 House members will be new next year. In Missouri, 75 of the 163 House members will be novices. The class of "true freshman" GOP representatives in Missouri's House will outnumber both the chamber's entire Democratic caucus and the number of returning Republicans. And New Hampshire will have 128 fresh faces in its 400-member House of Representatives.

Along with the possibility that legislative leaders will have trouble corralling freshman lawmakers in such states next year, lobbyists may wield more power as well. In Nevada, for instance, where nearly half the members of the state Assembly



will be rookies, the “new legislators will rely on their leadership, but they’ll also rely on lobbyists to help them understand the various nuances of legislating,” said Bob Crowell, mayor of Carson City and a veteran lobbyist who represents a variety of interests at the Legislature. “Whether that’s a criticism, I’m not sure.” (STATELINE.ORG)

Upcoming stories

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

- **2011 Preview**
- **Workforce bullying**
- **Synthetic pot**

POLITICS IN BRIEF: A joint House-Senate caucus in **MAINE** elected three candidates for statewide office nominated by the Legislature’s new Republican majority. The state’s new attorney general, William Schneider, state treasurer, Bruce Poliquin, and secretary of state, Charles Summers Jr. will each serve a two-year term (KENNEBEC JOURNAL). • In addition to switching from Democratic to Republican control next year, the **WISCONSIN** Legislature will be lead by two brothers. Rep. Jeff Fitzgerald (R) has been picked to be the next Speaker of the Assembly, and Sen. Scott Fitzgerald (R) has been selected as the Majority Leader of the Senate (NEW YORK TIMES). • A federal judge in **OKLAHOMA** ruled against a voter-approved constitutional restriction on the use of Islamic law in the state’s courts, declaring that the measure “fosters an excessive government entanglement with religion.” Oklahoma voters approved the amendment — State Question 755 — by a 70 percent to 30 percent margin, but an American-born Muslim sued two days later, blocking the state Election Board from certifying the results (OKLAHOMAN [OKLAHOMA CITY]). • **ALABAMA** Gov. Bob Riley (R) has called a special session for this week to overhaul the state’s ethics laws. Republicans who comprise the new majorities in the House and Senate campaigned on tougher ethics laws (MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

Governors

WESTERN GOVS SEEK NEW WOLF PLAN: A trio of Western governors is working with the Obama administration on what Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal (D) called “a road map” to remove Northern Rockies wolves from protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. Freudenthal, Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer (D) and Idaho Gov. Butch Otter (R) met with Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar last week to try and hash out a de-listing plan over the objection of environmental groups that want the wolves to remain federally protected and not under state control.

At issue is the rapidly growing number of wolves in the region, and whether the species is recovered enough to take off the ESA list and turn over to states for management. De-listing supporters point to the federal government's original goal of having a population of 300 wolves when it began its reintroduction program in the Northern Rockies in the 1990s. Biologists say there are now at least 1,700 wolves in parts of six states. But opponents have recently mounted two successful legal challenges to handing over the wolves to states, mostly on the basis of Wyoming's plan, which calls for allowing wolves to be shot on sight. The courts have so far not accepted that plan, and have also decreed that Montana and Idaho cannot take over wolf management unless Wyoming changes its policy. The proposed Montana and Idaho plans also allow wolves to be hunted, but under more rigorous regulation.

All three states want to allow the hunts to better protect livestock and other species they say are endangered by the growing wolf packs. The frustration, Freudenthal says, "is that everybody recognizes that the (wolf) population is not only recovered, but it is robust."

With legal battles not going their way, the states are hopeful Congress will end the matter by declaring the wolves to be fully recovered before the end of the year. Several bills are pending in Congress, and Salazar told the gobs last week he would support their effort to see the wolves de-listed and was confident it could happen. But Schweitzer was more pessimistic.

"The secretary was optimistic, and God love him for being optimistic," Schweitzer said. "Me, I would be pleasantly surprised if Congress could act."

Meanwhile, the Obama administration said it would keep working with Wyoming officials to broker a new management plan that would pass judicial muster and allow all three states to take control of the wolf population. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, WASHINGTON POST)

PATERSON WON'T PUSH GAY MARRIAGE BILL: Faced with the likelihood of another bruising defeat, New York Gov. David Paterson (D) said he would not make another push this year to get a same-sex marriage bill through the Empire State Legislature. A similar measure was convincingly rejected by the state

The week in session

States in Regular Session: CA, DC, NJ, US

States in Recess: IL, IN (2011), ME(2011), MI, NY

States in Special Session: AL "a", CA "i"

Special Sessions in Recess: CT "a", CT "b", DE "b", NY "x"

Upcoming Special Sessions:

CA "i" regarding Budget Deficit convenes 12/06/2010. AL "a" regarding Ethics Reform convenes 12/08/2010.

States in 2011 Organizational

Sessions: AL - 12/06/2010, CA - 12/06/2010, ID - Held 12/02/2010, ME - Held 12/01/2010, ND - 12/06/2010, NH - Held 12/01/2010

States in Informal Session: MA

States in Veto Session: IL (11/16/2010 - 12/02/2010)

States Currently Prefiling or Drafting

for 2011: AR, FL, GA, IA, KY, MT, ND, NH, NV, OK, TN, TX, VA, WY

States Adjourned in 2010: AK, AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, ME, MN, MO, MS, NC, NE, NH, NM, OK, PA, PR, RI, SC, SD, TN, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY

State Special Sessions Adjourned in

2010: AZ "a", AZ "b", AZ "c", AZ "d", CA "e", CA "f", CA "h", FL "a", FL "b", HI "d", HI "e", KY "a", MN "a", MN "b", MO "a", MS "a", MS "b", NH "a", NJ "a", NM "a", NV "b", NY "w", OR "a", PA "a", TN "a", UT "a", WA "a", WI "b", WV "a", WV "b"

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS
(session information current as of 12/2/2010)
Source: State Net database



Senate last year. Paterson says he polled that chamber again recently to determine if another try was warranted, but came away convinced the answer was no. (NEW YORK TIMES)

RENDELL CITES CASTLE LOOPHOLE:

Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell (D) said he vetoed the state’s expansion of its Castle Doctrine law -- which allows residents to use deadly force against intruders – because it did not close the so-called “Florida loophole.” The provision allows Keystone State residents to obtain gun permits in another state even if they have been denied one in Pennsylvania. Rendell said that doing away with that part of the law would likely have convinced him to sign the expansion (HB 1926), which would have allowed residents to also use deadly force outside of their home if they felt physically threatened. (STATE NET, PATRIOT-NEWS [HARRISBURG])

GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: Former **NORTH CAROLINA** Gov. Mike Easley (D) was convicted last Tuesday of knowingly filing a false campaign report after admitting he failed to note on a required campaign disclosure that he took a \$1,600 helicopter ride with a supporter in October 2006. He became the first Tar Heel State governor to admit to a felony. The plea bargain, which ended a lengthy federal investigation, garnered Easley a \$1,000 fine and \$153 in court costs (CHARLOTTE NEWS & OBSERVER).

– *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

<p>Upcoming elections 12/02/2010 - 12/23/2010</p> <p>12/14/2010 South Carolina Special Election House District 21</p> <p>Texas Special Election House District 44</p>
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Hot issues

B **USINESS:** The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration temporarily bans five chemicals used to make synthetic marijuana. The five synthetic cannaboids have effects that mirror that of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, which gives pot its potency. The agency plans to list the chemicals as Schedule 1 drugs, considered to be the most restrictive rating, for up to one year while it conducts studies to determine if they should be permanently banned. At least 17 states have already banned the sale of products containing the chemicals, which are often sold under brand names like K2 or Black Mamba Spice (NEW YORK TIMES). • The **NEW JERSEY** Senate approves AB 3359, which would prohibit employers from barring or discouraging unemployed applicants from applying for advertised job openings. It moves to Gov. Chris Christie (R) for review (STAR-



LEDGER [NEWARK]). • **PENNSYLVANIA** Gov. Ed Rendell (D) vetoes HB 1231, legislation that would have expanded workers compensation claims coverage for firefighters diagnosed with certain types of cancer. Rendell said the bill could pass along potentially huge bills to local governments (PATRIOT-NEWS [HARRISBURG]). • The **ILLINOIS** Legislature’s Executive Committee approves HB 1846, legislation that would permit the Prairie State’s nine riverboat casinos to set up segregated, enclosed smoking areas. The measure now wafts over to the full House (BLOOMINGTON PANTAGRAPH).

At Issue in the States

Want to learn more about State Net, our legislative experts or the Capitol Journal staff? Visit our blog, <http://statenet.typepad.com/at-issue-in-the-states/>. It's a great way to find out in a flash what's going on in statehouses across the country...like yours!

CRIME & PUNISHMENT: A federal judge in **OKLAHOMA** continues her earlier decision to block a voter-approved constitutional amendment that forbids state courts from considering or using international law or Sharia law, or laws based on the tenets of the Quran. State officials are considering an appeal (OKLAHOMAN [OKLAHOMA CITY]). • **PENNSYLVANIA** Gov. Ed Rendell (D) vetoes HB 1926, the so-called Castle Doctrine expansion bill, which would have allowed Keystone State residents to use deadly force to defend themselves outside of their homes, including in their vehicles or any other public spot they have a legal right to be. Rendell said he feared it would lead to a “shoot first, ask later mentality.” Supporters vow to reintroduce it in the new session. Gov.-elect Tom Corbett (R) has said he supports it (STATE NET). • The **OHIO** Senate approves SB 235, a bill that makes human trafficking a stand-alone felony punishable by up to eight years in jail. The measure moves to the House for review (COLUMBUS DISPATCH).

EDUCATION: **VIRGINIA** Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli (R) releases an official opinion that says public school officials have the authority to seize and search the contents of students’ cell phones and laptops “when there is a reasonable suspicion that the student is violating the law or the rules of the school.” The opinion came at the request of a group of high school principals who said they were concerned about the growing prevalence of cyberbullying in schools (RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH)).

ENVIRONMENT: The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rules that **OREGON** and **WASHINGTON** officials must stop killing sea lions that eat endangered salmon in the Columbia River. The court said the federal government had failed to show justification for allowing the sea lions to be captured and euthanized for eating the endangered fish when it allows humans to take a comparable or even larger catch (SPOKESMAN-REVIEW [SPOKANE]). • **PENNSYLVANIA** Gov. Ed Rendell (D) signs HB 708, which creates a statewide program to recycle electronic waste like computers and televisions. The program is funded through a registration fee paid



by manufacturers and retailers (PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE). • The **NEW YORK** Assembly approves SB 8129, legislation that would enact a temporary moratorium on natural gas drilling in the Empire State. Supporters of the measure say the hydraulic fracturing process used to extract the gas contaminates groundwater supplies. The bill now goes to Gov. David Paterson (D) for review (DEMOCRAT & CHRONICLE [ROCHESTER]).

In case you missed it

The FDA last week followed up on the action of several states that have moved to block the sale of highly caffeinated alcohol drinks blamed for numerous illnesses and even some deaths.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/11-22-2010/html

HEALTH & SCIENCE: A federal appeals court rules that a **VERMONT** law which bars the sale, transmission or use of prescriber-identifiable data for marketing a prescription drug unless the prescribing doctor consents is unconstitutional. The court said the statute violates the First Amendment. State officials are considering an appeal (BURLINGTON FREE PRESS). • **PENNSYLVANIA** Gov. Ed Rendell (D) signs HB 1482, which requires health care workers to wear a photo ID badge while on the job (STATE NET). • The **ILLINOIS** House rejects SB 1381, Senate-approved legislation that would have made the Prairie State the 16th to allow critically ill people to use medically-prescribed marijuana (STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER [SPRINGFIELD]).

SOCIAL POLICY: The **NEW JERSEY** Assembly unanimously approves AB 3405, legislation that would require Garden State assisted living facilities to set up escrow funds that would only be tapped if the site closes down. Those funds would pay for the continued care of residents who were promised when they moved into the facility that they would not be evicted once they became eligible for Medicaid. The bill has returned to the Senate for consideration of changes made in the Assembly (STAR-LEDGER [NEWARK]). • **PENNSYLVANIA** Gov. Ed Rendell (D) signs HB 2338, which establishes a foster care bill of rights that defines the mental, physical, educational, social and medical treatment the Keystone State will provide to foster children (PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE). • The **ILLINOIS** House and Senate endorse SB 1716, legislation that would allow same-sex couples to enter into legally sanctioned civil unions. The bill would not override the state's ban on gay marriage, but would grant same-sex couples rights and benefits assigned to married couples as they apply to insurance benefits, health care decisions, property and its disposition, and a number of probate and estate issues. The measure now heads to Gov. Pat Quinn (D), who is expected to sign it into law (CHICAGO TRIBUNE).

POTPOURRI: A federal judge in **MISSOURI** rules that Show Me State police can't enforce state statutes prohibiting desecration of the American flag and protests near funerals. The court ruled that a state law barring the protests violates the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment (WICHITA EAGLE). • The **OREGON** Department



of Agriculture announces it will no longer issue permits to own exotic pets like chimpanzees, tigers and crocodiles. Officials said the policy will go into effect on January 1, and current owners of such pets will be allowed to keep them until the animal dies (OREGONIAN [PORTLAND]). • **PENNSYLVANIA** Gov. Ed Rendell (D) vetoes HB 2477, legislation that would have restricted some coroner’s reports from public view. Rendell said the public’s “right to know” overrode the bill’s intention to keep some records private (PATRIOT-NEWS [HARRISBURG]). • The **ILLINOIS** House and Senate each override Gov. Pat Quinn’s (D) veto of HB 5154, which barred the obtaining of public employee evaluations under state open records laws (CHICAGO TRIBUNE).

— Compiled by RICH EHISEN

Once around the statehouse lightly

CORNED BEEF COMPROMISE: Prairie State politics is not for the faint of heart. Thus it was no surprise that the race for the Illinois governorship between incumbent Pat Quinn and challenger Bill Brady was a knock down drag out brawl that left both men with some bruised feelings. But as the *Chicago Tribune* reports, the two recently sat down at a well known Windy City deli to gobble down massive corn beef sandwiches and make nice. The meeting went well, though both men conceded they still don’t see eye to eye on several things, particularly whether a tax hike is needed to help balance the state’s gaping budget hole. “The governor and I have agreed to disagree” on the tax issue. Quinn and Brady did agree that it was a nice get together, with Brady adding, “It was particularly nice that he bought lunch.” Who needs bullets when you have a perfect brisket?

KEEPING UP WITH THE KARDASHIANS: If you were thinking of getting one of the new debit cards adorned with the image of those crazy Kardashian sisters, think again. As the *Hartford Courant* reports, the trio has pulled their endorsement of a pre-paid debit card with just such an image, issued by a Minnesota bank, after Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal launched an investigation into what he called the card’s “predatory fees.” Blumenthal, who was recently elected to the U.S. Senate, noted the card’s long litany of “gotcha fees and charges,” including a \$99.95 annual charge just to have the thing. A lawyer for the hard partying trio decried the action, insisting the girls have worked hard to “create a positive public persona that appeals to everyone, particularly young adults.” Especially young adults who want to pay through the nose.



DON'T TAX ME, BRO: How goofy is California? This goofy: a new *Los Angeles Times* poll shows that Golden State residents vehemently oppose tax hikes to close the state's perpetual budget deficit, preferring instead for the shortfall to be met with spending cuts. But the poll also shows those same folks vehemently oppose cutting programs and services that make up — wait for it — 85 percent of the state's General Fund obligations. The apparent disconnect was not lost on at least a few rational observers. "Their priorities are incompatible with resolving the deficit situation," said Republican pollster Linda Divall, who co-authored the survey. Gee, you think?

MAD AS HELL AND NOT GONNA TAKE IT ANY MORE: If you are a young woman angry about being treated badly in a male-dominated society, what better way to get the fellas' attention than by going topless? That is exactly what hordes of young women in Ukraine have been doing of late in order to draw attention to what they see as being forced into "a demeaning role in society." As Reuters reports, a group of at least 300 bare-chested young women took out their anger on Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, launching a topless street protest that included numerous raunchy sexual references during his visit to Ukraine. Until then, police were apparently willing to overlook the protests as "harmless pranks," but as the ladies target more political figures and causes, signs point to harsher responses going forward. Why go topless? The group's leaders say it's simple: that's the only way to get the men's attention for their causes.

— *By RICH EHISEN*

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Editor: Rich Ehsen — capj@statenet.com
Associate Editor: Korey Clark — capj@statenet.com
Contributing Editors: Virginia Nelson, Art Zimmerman
Editorial Advisor: Lou Cannon
Correspondents: Richard Cox (CA), Steve Karas (CA),
Bruce McKeeman (CA), James Ross (CA), Linda Mendenhall (IL),
Lauren Davis (MA) and Ben Livingood (PA)
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