

December 22, 2008

# Save Our States



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The next issue of  
Capitol Journal will be  
available on January 12th.

## Top Story

*Not long ago, states were flush with both money and a wide array of ideas on how to spend it. Now, the money is all gone, the big projects are idle and states are practically begging the feds to send help.*

## SNCJ Spotlight

**States' great expectations turn to cries for help**

A year ago, during the dying days of the global economic boom, state officeholders throughout the land glowed in the anticipation of continued prosperity. When the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) reported on the fiscal health of states in November 2007, not a single state

## A Cannon Perspective



With Lou Cannon

gave a pessimistic appraisal of its prospects. Indeed, governors across the land were unveiling creative initiatives that seemed to ratify Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis' famous declaration that states are laboratories of democracy.

The boldest plan came from CALIFORNIA, where Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed a far-reaching health care program that would have covered most of the uninsured. Five other states — ILLINOIS, MISSOURI, NEW MEXICO, NEW YORK, and PENNSYLVANIA — also planned to expand health insurance in significant ways. In ARIZONA, Gov. Janet Napolitano (D) proposed free college tuition for every child in the state who graduated from high school with a B average. WASHINGTON talked of providing its citizens with paid family leave.

All these rosy ideas were blown away like autumn leaves by the housing collapse and the subsequent economic implosion. When NCSL issued this year's November report, 38 states had budget gaps and many of them were trimming programs or freezing payrolls in an effort to reduce deficits. "The state budget situation is grim and getting worse with each new revenue revision," the report said. Corina Eckl, director of fiscal programs for NCSL, said in an interview that the situation will become "frightening" in fiscal 2010, which for all but four states begins on July 1. Every source of state revenue is plunging fast. As unemployment rises, income tax revenues decline.

As housing foreclosures intensify and people spend less, sales tax revenues fall. States that depend on tourism, such as NEVADA and HAWAII, have been hurt by a decline in travel. Even the handful of states, such as WYOMING and TEXAS, that are relatively well-off because of income from resource taxes, have been hurt by slumping oil prices. In ALASKA, where the state budget was supposed to be perpetually balanced, a deficit opened this month after the price of oil dropped below \$65 a barrel.

The plight of the states exacerbates a downturn that economists say has the potential to become the worst since the Great Depression. The human costs are high, particularly in jobless benefits and health care services. Thirty states are at risk of having the funds that pay out unemployment benefits become insolvent by late spring or early summer; MICHIGAN and INDIANA are already borrowing funds from the federal government to make these payments. Several governors have asked Congress to provide additional funds for the Medicaid program that serves the poor and disabled.

Testifying before Congress on Dec. 11, NEW JERSEY Gov. Jon Corzine (D) said that the decline in revenues in his state had impacted child welfare agencies, prisons, and aid for the developmentally disabled and mentally ill. He asked for federal help for infrastructure projects he said were "shovel-ready." At the same hearing WISCONSIN Gov. Jim Doyle (D) said he faced a \$5.4 billion gap, 17 percent of the fiscal 2010 budget, despite a 10 percent cut in the state work force. "We will be forced to cut the very tools and services that people depend on to pull them out of recession," Doyle said.

In total shortfall, populous California is far and away the dubious leader. CALIFORNIA anticipates a \$41.8 billion budget gap by July 2010, nearly half the \$86 billion in revenue the state expects to collect during the coming fiscal year.





States are no less likely than individuals to exaggerate the impact of both booms and busts. Scott Pattison, executive director of the National Association of Budget Officers and a former director of finance in VIRGINIA, told Stateline.org that he wondered if the forecasts that were once so rosy are now excessively grim and “might slightly overcorrect.” Beyond this possibility — which amounts to a hope that the recession will be shorter and milder than generally predicted — states may benefit from the gigantic federal stimulus that Barack Obama has said he will propose to rebuild roads, bridges, and other parts of the nation’s crumbling infrastructure. The conundrum, as *The Economist* observed, is “that it is hard to spend both rapidly and wisely.”

Clearly, the President-elect has a sense of this difficulty: he has pledged that his administration will choose the “best” projects based on overall utility rather than on political considerations. But this is not a promise Obama can redeem by himself. To succeed, he will necessarily rely on the recommendations of states, vital partners in America’s federal system. If the stimulus is to be spent wisely, states will have to do more than identify the projects that are, in Gov. Corzine’s words, shovel-ready to begin.

— Lou Cannon

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## Budget & taxes

**D**EMS LAUNCH BUDGET END RUN IN CA: CALIFORNIA’S Democratic legislative leaders hatched a bold plan last week to ease the state’s fiscal crisis: raise gas, sales and income taxes through a series of legal maneuvers that circumvent the state’s two-thirds majority requirement for — and Republican resistance to — tax increases.

The gambit would raise \$9.3 billion through a three-quarter-cent increase in the sales tax, a 13-cent-per-gallon hike in the gas tax and a 2.5 percent income tax surcharge. Combined with billions in cuts to schools, healthcare and other programs, it would almost halve the \$41.8 billion budget shortfall projected for the state over the next 18 months.

The plan hinges on the legal distinction between taxes, which are imposed broadly and used for general purposes, and fees, charged to users of specific public benefits, such as roads, and an arcane loophole in state law allowing the passage of a tax bill with a simple majority vote as long as the tax doesn’t raise more revenue. What the Democrats intend to do is eliminate the gas tax and some other existing fees and substitute them with tax increases, including the income tax surcharge and a 9.9 percent levy on oil extraction. Then the Democrats would re-impose the gas fees at higher levels (fees can also be raised with a simple majority vote), generating billions of dollars in new revenue.

With Republicans having repeatedly blocked their budget and tax proposals, Democrats said the plan was the only way to break the budget deadlock, which has dragged on for over a month since Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) called lawmakers into special session.

“I still believe in bipartisanship,” said Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D) at a Capitol news conference before voting on the proposal last Wednesday. “But there is an even greater responsibility than practicing bipartisanship, and that is to govern. And that is what we intend to do here today.”

Republicans saw things a little differently.

“Raising taxes on people and playing funny math and calling it fees is not governing,” said Assembly GOP leader Mike Villines. “That’s trickery, is what that is.”

**“Raising taxes on people and playing funny math and calling it fees is not governing. That’s trickery, is what that is.”**

Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, said the Democrats’ plan violates Proposition 13, the 1978 initiative capping property taxes and requiring all other tax increases to be approved by a two-thirds vote.

“If they proceed with this proposal to raise taxes with a simple majority vote, they will be sued and they will lose,” Coupal said. “So we’re very confident this is more of a ploy than anything else.”

Legal experts said there was no way of knowing how the courts would rule on the law if it passed. Judges might strike it down, fearing a recall effort like the populist uprising that led to Prop. 13, they said, or the courts might refuse to take action that could plunge the state into insolvency.

“It is absolutely a shell game,” said Kirk Stark, a professor at UCLA School of Law, although he pointed out that “in the 30 years since Prop. 13 was enacted, the courts have been accommodating of legislative ingenuity.”

But the proposal faces another stumbling block that could prevent it from ever making it to the courts. A spokesman for Schwarzenegger said the governor wouldn’t sign the bill unless it included mortgage relief, provisions allowing more of the construction and management of government facilities to be done by private firms, and cuts to the state’s workforce, which public employee unions are resisting.

“If it doesn’t have these components, then the vote...is nothing more than a drill,” the spokesman said. (LOS ANGELES TIMES)

**STATE-LOCAL GOVERNMENT STIMULUS SPAT:** The nation’s worsening economy is increasing tension between state and local governments. Case in point: a report sent Dec. 15 by the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties to Obama’s transition team advising them of the best way to distribute the infrastructure money from the economic stimulus package that is in the works.

“The quickest, most effective way to achieve the intended results of a federal stimulus package is to send federal funds directly to local governments,” the report said.

City and county leaders, bothered about state officials slashing local government aid to shore up their own budget gaps and about the governors’ visit with Obama earlier this month to ask him to direct stimulus money to the states, felt the need to make their case that cities and counties should actually get most of the money because they have most of the infrastructure.

The local officials focused on Obama’s assertion that speed is critical in order for the stimulus effort to be effective.

“We must make sure that the funding is spent quickly, and not stuck in federal or state bureaucracies,” said Miami Mayor Manny Diaz, president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, which submitted a \$90 billion infrastructure plan to the transition team.

State officials countered that giving the money directly to cities and counties wouldn’t save time, and Congress set up the current system, with state transportation departments making the majority of the spending decisions, because states are able to look at the big picture and not just the transportation concerns of a single area.

“It has to do with setting priorities,” said Raymond C. Scheppach, executive director of the National Governors Association. “You have to plan statewide.”

A spokesman for state transportation officials seemed inclined to agree. He said state officials aren’t trying to pick a fight with cities and counties.

“But we have a proven system that works. All we have to do is get the money in the pipeline.” (STATELINE.ORG)

**BUDGETS IN BRIEF:** For the first time in a quarter of a century, states expect to see a decline in spending this fiscal year, according to a report released last week by the National Association of State Budget Officers and the National Governors Association. State spending grew only 5 percent last fiscal year, well below the 9 percent rate in FY 2007 and even lower than the 30-year average of 6.4 percent (STATELINE.ORG). • **FLORIDA** legislative leaders announced last week that they

## The week in session

**States in Regular Session:** CA, IL, OH

**States in Recess:** DC, IN 2009, MI, NJ, NY

**States in Special Session:** CA 2009 “a”, CA 2009 “b”

**Special Sessions in Recess:** DE “b”

**States in Informal Session:** MA

**In Pro Forma Session:** US

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

**States Currently Prefiling or Drafting for 2009:** AL, AR, AZ, CT, FL, GA, IA, KY, MO, MT, ND, NH, NM, NV, OK, SC, SD, TN, TX, VA, WA, WY

**States Adjourned in 2008:** AK, AL, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, ME, MN, MO, MS, NC, NE, NH, NM, OK, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY

**State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2008:** AK “c”, AK “d”, AL “a”, AR “a”, CA “a”, CA “c”, CT “a”, CT “b”, CT “c”, CT “d”, CT “e”, DE “a”, KY “a”, LA “a”, LA “b”, ME “a”, MS “a”, NC “b”, NE “a”, NH “a”, NM “a”, NV “a”, NY “a”, NY “b”, OR “a”, PA “a”, UT “a”, VA “a”, VA “b”, WI “c”, WI “d”, WI “e”, WV “a”, WV “b”

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(session information current as of 12/18/2008)  
Source: State Net database



will convene a two-week extraordinary session Jan. 5 to close the state's growing \$2.3-billion budget hole (ST. PETERSBURG TIMES). • Last week, **ALABAMA** Gov. Bob Riley (R) announced a 12.5 percent across-the-board spending cut, the largest since education spending was reduced 14.1 percent in 1961 (ASSOCIATED PRESS, SUN HERALD [BILOXI]). **NEW YORK** Gov. David Paterson (D) released a 2009-10 budget proposal last week calling for massive cuts to education and healthcare, elimination of a residential property tax rebate program and 88 new taxes and fees (DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE [ROCHESTER]). • **ILLINOIS** Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) signed SB 1981, legislation that raises the state's film tax credit to 30 percent. The credit, which was previously 20 percent, is given to filmmakers for money spent on goods and services purchased in the Prairie State, including wages paid to state residents (CHICAGO TRIBUNE).

**Upcoming elections**  
12/18/2008 - 1/8/2009

01/06/2009  
**Virginia Special Election**  
House 081 (Suit, Terrie L.)

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

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# Politics & leadership

**A TALE OF TWO U.S. SENATE SEATS:** These are the best of times and the worst of times for ILLINOIS, home of both the first African-American president-elect of the United States and the national scandal over his U.S. Senate seat. The melodrama continued last week, with the attorney for Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D), Ed Genson, appearing before the House committee weighing whether to recommend the governor's impeachment.

Genson told the committee it would be illegal for them to use material from the federal wiretaps of Blagojevich discussing selling and trading Obama's Senate seat, which he simultaneously dismissed as "people jabbering." He also took exception to a rule adopted by the committee stipulating that the governor's legal representation not be provided "at public expense." He even challenged the panel itself, saying some of its members ought to be removed because of statements they'd made about the governor.

"A number of people on this committee expressed views that were perfectly clear that they already made up their minds," he said.

The committee's chairwoman, Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie (D), rebuffed Genson's objections, saying the panel was committed to "due process and fair play," it was "not the appropriate venue" for deciding whether Genson should be paid by the state's taxpayers, and it had wide latitude on handling evidence.

"We're not a court of law. We're not quite a grand jury," she said. "We're not bound by specific rules of evidence."







“She has the right to do executive orders,” L’Ecuyer said, “And when she believes they are good policy, as she does on this one, we move forward.”  
(ARIZONA REPUBLIC [PHOENIX])

**CRIST EVERGLADES DEAL MOVES CLOSER:** After months of negotiations, FLORIDA water managers agreed to buy nearly 300 square miles of land from United States Sugar last week for \$1.34 billion. Fans of the land purchase, most notably Gov. Charlie Crist (R), who has championed the deal for more than a year, say it could ultimately revive and reshape current Everglades restoration efforts. But even those supporters acknowledge there is a chance the state’s deepening financial crisis could undermine the entire project.

“When push comes to shove, I’m not sure we can afford this deal,” said Shannon Estenoz, an environmental activist and the governing board vice chair of the South Florida Water Management District, which approved the deal. The District was in fact so concerned about the state’s worsening budget situation that it added an amendment to the contract that says the purchase must not “adversely affect” core district operations like flood control.

Even with those concerns, Crist called the purchase “the most important step in the history of true Everglades restoration.” There is, however, at least one more major hurdle for the state to clear. Last week’s affirmative vote started a 60-day auction period, in which United States Sugar’s shareholders must consider competing offers. One other major offer has been made, by a family-owned farming company called the Lawrence Group. Florida Crystals, a politically powerful competitor that owns strategically located land for restoration, has also sued to stop a state court from approving the contract. (NEW YORK TIMES, MIAMI HERALD)

**GOVERNORS IN BRIEF:** • President-elect Barack Obama has named former IOWA Gov. Tom Vilsack (D) to lead the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Vilsack also sought the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination before dropping out early in the race (ASSOCIATED PRESS). • MICHIGAN Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D), on the other hand, said last week that she does not want to be considered for an Obama cabinet position (DETROIT FREE PRESS). • FLORIDA Gov. Charlie Crist (R) tied the knot last week, marrying the former Carol Lynn Rome in St. Petersburg. The event drew about 150 protesters, most of whom were there to advocate for same-sex marriage in the Sunshine State (TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT). • TEXAS Gov. Rick Perry (R) became the longest-serving governor in Lone Star State history last week. Perry, who became governor in 2000 when George W. Bush was elected President and has since twice won re-election, also plans to seek another term in 2010 (AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN). • OHIO Gov. Ted Strickland (D) said he will veto legislation that would raid the state’s “Rainy Day” fund in order to give veterans of the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War and the ongoing fighting in Iraq and



Afghanistan bonuses up to \$1,000 before Christmas. Strickland said he supports the concept of the bonuses, but believes the state should sell bonds to fund the project (DAYTON DAILY NEWS).

— Compiled by RICH EHISEN

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## Hot issues

**B**USINESS: An **OHIO** court says a Buckeye State law that bars residents from bringing in alcohol purchased out of state is unconstitutional. The court said the statute conflicts with federal law that regulates interstate commerce (CINCINNATI ENQUIRER). • **CALIFORNIA**-based Toymaker Mattel, Inc. agrees to pay \$12 million to settle charges that it violated consumer laws in 39 states by selling lead-tainted toys in 2007. Mattel and its Fisher Price unit recalled more than 21 million Chinese-made toys last year, fearing the items were tainted with lead paint and tiny magnets that children could accidentally swallow (ASSOCIATED PRESS). • The **MASSACHUSETTS** Senate approves HB 4508, legislation allowing the Bay State insurance commissioner to establish regulations to protect members of the military and their families from unscrupulous sales practices of companies that sell insurance. It moves to Gov. Deval Patrick (D) for review (MILFORD DAILY NEWS). • The **NEW JERSEY** Assembly approves AB 2650, which would require developers of major projects to submit audited annual financial statements, post performance bonds worth 110 percent of the public funds dedicated to the project and to spend at least \$1 in private money for each \$5 in public funds. The new requirements, which would also set aside one-tenth of the taxpayer funds until the project is complete, would apply to all projects using more than \$50 million in federal funds. It moves to the Senate, which has its own similar bill under consideration (STAR-LEDGER [NEWARK]). • Still in **NEW JERSEY**, the state Supreme Court rules that lawyers named to lists such as “Super Lawyers” or “Best Lawyers in America” may include that information in their advertising. The court said such information is constitutionally protected free speech (STAR-LEDGER [NEWARK]). • Back in **OHIO**, the Senate approves HB 79, legislation that preserves the state’s current group rating system for workers compensation insurance. A Buckeye State court ruled in November that the system is unfair to businesses unable to access a group, but lawmakers said they must maintain the system in order for those businesses in special pricing groups to avoid rate hikes. The bill moves now to the House (CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER). • Also in **OHIO**, the House rejects HB 230, which would have required those under age 18 to get a doctor’s prescription in order to use a commercial tanning bed (CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER).



**CRIME & PUNISHMENT:** The **OHIO** Senate unanimously passes HB 215, making it illegal to sell or possess the highly hallucinogenic herb Salvia Divinorum. The measure now moves to Gov. Ted Strickland (D), who is expected to sign it (CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER).

**EDUCATION:** The **MASSACHUSETTS** House and Senate endorse HB 4396, a measure that bars registered sex offenders from being employed as a school bus driver. Current Bay State law prohibits only those convicted of certain sex-related crimes from driving the buses. The legislation moves to Gov. Deval Patrick (D) for consideration (STATE NET). • **NEW JERSEY** officials announce that students using the Garden State’s NJCLASS college loan program will no longer be able to defer making payments until after they graduate. Loan program officials say they made the changes after the number of students choosing to defer payments grew to more than 50 percent of all loan recipients this year (STAR-LEDGER [NEWARK]).

**ENVIRONMENT:** The **CALIFORNIA** Air Resources Board orders owners of heavy-duty diesel trucks to install soot traps on exhaust pipes of older, high-polluting rigs or take them off the road. The new rules go into effect in 2011 (SACRAMENTO BEE). • Still in **CALIFORNIA**, officials launch a “green initiative” that would eventually require labeling on every consumer product to reveal its “environmental footprint.” The plan is expected to require a significant number of legislative measures and new regulations and take as long as 10 years to develop (LOS ANGELES TIMES). • State and federal officials agree to allow bison to migrate into parts of **MONTANA** from Yellowstone National Park. The move will allow at least some bison leaving the park to avoid being shot by hunters as part of a program meant to guard against transmissions of the disease brucellosis to cattle. More than 3,000 bison have been killed outside the park in recent years, including more than 1,600 last year (BILLINGS GAZETTE).

**HEALTH & SCIENCE:** The **OHIO** House overwhelmingly endorses SB 203, legislation that would require Buckeye State pharmacy technicians to pass a competency test as well as a criminal background check. It moves to Gov. Ted Strickland (D) for review (CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER). • **ILLINOIS** Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) signs SB 934, legislation that requires health insurance companies to cover the cost of treating autism in individuals under age 21. The statute caps required benefits at \$36,000 per year (DAILY HERALD [ARLINGTON HEIGHTS]). • **FLORIDA**-based Airborne Health, makers of a top-selling product marketed as a cold prevention and treatment remedy, signs a \$7 million settlement related to false

## In case you missed it

State lawmakers and governors in 2009 will face a plethora of major challenges as they struggle to guide their states through an historic economic downturn. Last week, in the second of a two-part series, the State Net staff examined some of the key issues we see lawmakers considering in the coming year.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at [http://www.statenet.com/capitol\\_journal/12-15-2008/html](http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/12-15-2008/html)



advertising claims leveled by 32 state attorneys general and the District of Columbia. The settlement also bars the company from claiming its products treat cold symptoms or prevent colds, flu and infections unless it provides “reliable and competent scientific evidence” to verify the claim (SEATTLE TIMES).

**SOCIAL POLICY:** The **OHIO** Senate endorses HB 280, which would require clinics that perform abortions to post signs noting that the procedure is voluntary. The bill, which also increases the penalty for domestic violence against a pregnant woman, returns to the House for expected concurrence on changes made in the Senate before it can be sent to Gov. Ted Strickland (D), who has indicated he will sign it into law (COLUMBUS DISPATCH, DAYTON DAILY NEWS).

**POTPOURRI:** The **MASSACHUSETTS** House and Senate each approve SB 2103, which requires drivers on multi-lane highways to give wide clearance for roadside emergency vehicles with flashing lights. Violators could face a ticket of up to \$100. The bill moves to Gov. Deval Patrick (D) for review (STATE NET). • The **OHIO** House approves SB 269, which would bar musical groups from billing themselves as a widely recognized group unless the current lineup contains at least one member of the original group. The measure now goes to Gov. Ted Strickland (D) for review (COLUMBUS DISPATCH). • Still in **OHIO**, lawmakers endorse legislation that requires kids younger than age 9 and less than 4-foot-9-inches tall to sit in a booster seat when riding in a car. It also moves to Gov. Strickland, who is expected to sign it (DAYTON DAILY NEWS, STATE NET).

— Compiled by RICH EHISEN

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## Once around the statehouse lightly

**B**UT I CAN'T SEE THE WHITE HOUSE: ALASKA Gov. Sarah Palin may not have won the second banana job at the White House, but she did have the top quote of 2008. Well, kinda sorta. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Fred Shapiro, the man responsible for the *Yale Book of Quotations*, has listed “I can see Russia from my house!” as the nation’s most memorable public utterance this year. Of course, Palin herself never said that. The words actually came from comedian Tina Fey, who was famously satirizing Palin’s lack of foreign policy experience on NBC’s *Saturday Night Live*. One of the gov’s real quotes — one in

which she struggled to name a single newspaper or magazine that she reads — did finish second, however.

**LOW BLOW:** Speaking of SNL, Palin supporters complained regularly during the presidential campaign that the show was unfairly hammering the governor. Now, the *New York Times* reports, the hue and cry is coming from the office of NEW YORK Gov. David S. Paterson. Risa Heller, Paterson’s communications director, took great exception to a recent skit that depicted the gov as something of a buffoon, repeatedly mocked the governor’s blindness and made several references to Paterson’s admitted previous drug use and marital infidelity. Heller castigated SNL for choosing “to ridicule people with physical disabilities and imply that disabled people are incapable of having jobs with serious responsibilities.” Both NBC and SNL had no comment on Heller’s critique.

**‘TIS THE SEASON:** As if folks in the ILLINOIS statehouse don’t have enough to worry about right now, there is apparently a sign thief running loose under the Capitol dome! According to the *State Journal-Register* in Springfield, an atheist group recently decided to protest the display of religious symbols in the statehouse by placing a sign decrying religion amidst the holiday brick-a-brack currently adorning the Capitol rotunda. But within the week someone had pilfered it. The group vowed to replace the sign, but said this time they will add a second one that implores potential thieves to remember one of the most basic Biblical commandments: Thou shall not steal.

**COLLATERAL DAMAGE:** Much has been made of the potential career damage done to the peripheral players in the ongoing corruption scandal involving ILLINOIS Gov. Rod Blagojevich. But while those close to the fire on this one may ultimately get burned, none are as likely to suffer from an association with Blago as the man he replaced, former Gov. George Ryan, currently serving a 6 1/2 year sentence for his own widespread corruption scandal. Ryan was hoping to convince President George W. Bush to grant him clemency before Barack Obama takes office, but as the *Chicago Sun-Times* reports, that now seems highly unlikely. At the least, says former Gov. Jim Thompson, the man leading the call for Ryan’s clemency, Blagojevich’s situation “certainly isn’t helpful” to Ryan’s cause. It probably also doesn’t help that Blagojevich gave his public support to the clemency request just days before his own arrest.

— By RICH EHISEN

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