

State budgeting could be bizarre exercise

Political machinations over California's budget dominate every legislative session, but this year's version of the annual budget game may be particularly bizarre due to a confluence of unusual factors, to wit:

- Not only is it an election year, but incumbents and aspirants will be running in districts that have been altered, sometimes hugely, by the state's new redistricting commission.

- This is also the first year for a new election system in which the top two finishers in the June primary, regardless of



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party, will face each other in November.

- Legislators briefly lost their salaries last year when they failed to produce a balanced budget by the June 15 constitutional deadline, thanks to a 2010 ballot measure that also gave Democrats hegemony over the budget by eliminating the two-thirds budget vote requirement.

- The 2011-12 budget that Democrats eventually enacted was based on the miraculous assumption of an extra \$4 billion in revenue. But most of the miracle money hasn't shown up, and spending is running billions of dollars over expectations, so the budget is

already way out of balance.

- Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature's budget analyst are billions of dollars apart on revenue estimates for the rest of the 2011-12 fiscal year and all of 2012-13.

- Democrats are unwilling to deal with the deficit now, due both to election year jitters over spending cuts that would affect major constituent groups, and to the revenue uncertainty.

- Gov. Brown has proposed major policy changes in his new budget, including landmark overhauls of school finance, child care and welfare, that have generated angst among constituent groups.

- Gov. Brown bases his 2012-13 budget

on voter approval of increases in sales and income taxes in November, but proposes spending cut "triggers," mostly on schools, to be pulled should the taxes be rejected.

Majority Democrats should be acting now to narrow the looming deficit, but will delay big decisions at least until late May, when spending and revenue estimates will be revised. And they'll probably wait until after the June 5 primary, so as to shield incumbents from casting budget votes that could backfire among primary voters.

The primary, however, is just 10 days before the June 15 constitutional deadline for a budget, and if the Democrats

generate another pie-in-the-sky budget that doesn't pass the smell test, as they did last year, they could again run afoul of the constitutional restriction on their salaries.

Controller John Chiang dropped the salary hammer on lawmakers after Mr. Brown vetoed the Legislature's first budget as being imbalanced.

Legislative leaders are now suing Mr. Chiang, contending that he lacks the power to cut off salaries and that only the Legislature itself can determine whether it has met the deadline.

Dan Walters writes for the Sacramento Bee.

Ringside with a split decision

The Republicans still have a lot of bullets in the magazine. Mitt Romney's tin ear, Rick Santorum's gag reflex, Newt Gingrich's endless pomposity and Ron Paul's narrow-minded consistency all come accompanied by big feet to shoot at.

You can't blame the Democrats for putting in a call to the caterer for a November party.

Messrs. Romney, Santorum and Gingrich all promise to rally around the ultimate winner, but fear grows in the not-so-grand party that they're encouraging independent voters, and maybe a lot of the faithful, to stay home on Nov. 6. But there may be nothing to fear but fear itself. When Hillary Clinton lost a brutal fight for the Democratic nomination four years ago, many women were so angry they vowed never to vote for Barack Obama. But they did, and the rest is unhappy history. When this year's campaign devolves to a one-on-one race, the Republicans, too, can get over their snits and pouts and galvanize themselves.

The Ronald Reagan precedent may apply, too. Mr. Romney is dogged by the complaint that he's simply "not conservative enough." That's what they said about Ronald Reagan as governor of California, where he presided over enactment of much liberal legislation, including a permissive abortion law. But when he became president of the United States, he defined "conser-

vative."

Mr. Romney didn't help his case with his description of himself as a "severe conservative." Methinks the gentleman doth boast too much, but Mr. Reagan, too, embraced the conservative label in words long

before deeds. The Gipper also had his gaffes along the way, blaming trees for smog and telling a funny story about the Mafia that terrified his aides that he had lost the Italian-American vote with one joke. The Gipper sprang from the rich and glamorous (old) Hollywood crowd,

where the only working-class blokes in Tinseltown lived in the imagination of moviemakers.

The Gipper's conservatism, like Mitt Romney's, was always more fiscal than social, and he persuaded voters that he understood what was wrong with the economy and how to fix it. He had the gift of returning criticism with wit and humor. When he was scolded for calling the recession a depression, he snapped back: "A recession is when your neighbor loses his job. A depression is when you lose yours. The recovery will be when Jimmy Carter loses his."

Like the Gipper, Mr. Romney rarely commits a gaffe on the economy. He talks up making it easier for entrepreneurs to start and run a business, and making it big enough to hire others. His call for a leaner government and less spending puts the focus on the huge debt dragging America down. If Mitt



Romney is no Ronald Reagan, neither was Mr. Reagan at this stage of the 1980 campaign.

It's a given that the Republican Party is badly split. Both political parties have their left-right right extremes, but the Republican split is more prominent today because President Obama stands unopposed, armed with unique presidential perks and powers. He preempted attention on Super Tuesday with a press conference, his first in five months. "I understand there are some political contests going on tonight," he said wryly, and wished Mr. Romney good luck with a devilish smile. That's playing smart politics with power.

He scolded the Republican contenders for beating the drums of war, but that was a reminder of his vow in the '08 campaign to sit down to talk to the Iranians, as if having a beer with old pals. Four years later, he says military force against Iran is an option, maybe.

The rap on Mitt Romney is that he can't seal the deal, while Rick

Santorum continues to thrill the tea partiers, stirring a brew with lots of lemons. He lost women big in Michigan with his tedious tutorial on bedroom ethics. He took the focus away from religious liberty, where it properly belongs, in the debate over the president's contraceptive mandate and revived public wariness of a Catholic president, a prejudice we thought John F. Kennedy had put to rest. He contributed to President Obama's class warfare with a suggestion that a college education is a conceit of snobs. This seems to have gone over well with the working-class voters in Ohio, but it's hard to imagine that this would be a winning strategy elsewhere.

We've all got ringside seats, and the bare knuckles are drawing blood. But the crowd is getting restless, waiting for the Massachusetts mauler to land the knockout punch. There's no crying in baseball, and there's no split decision in politics.

Suzanne Fields writes for Creators Syndicate.

What the foreign media are saying

The Telegraph, London, on family values:

Should put the well-being of the family at the heart of its policies. People want to be able to make a good life for themselves and their loved ones without fearing that the government of the day will do anything to inhibit or undermine them in this ambition. Three policies currently causing political controversy threaten to do just that. Proposals to impose a "mansion tax" on high-value properties, to withdraw child benefit from higher-rate tax payers, and to legislate for gay marriage have a unifying theme. They all risk undermining the traditional family.

A mansion tax strikes at the very notion of the continuity of family life. The family home is an important symbol of stability. Imposing an arbitrary tax on expensive homes attacks that principle. ... The Centre for Policy Studies points out that it would hit the "income poor, equity rich" — many of them older people.

The unfairness of George Osborne's proposal to strip child benefit from higher-rate taxpayers was well rehearsed in the Commons debate. Its most egregious impact is that it penalizes stay-at-home mothers compared with dual-income families. How can a Government that professes family values countenance such a measure?

As for gay marriage, where is the groundswell of opinion for such fundamental change to society's central institution? David Cameron's anxiety to appear a modernizing party leader threatens to create a wholly unnecessary political headache while raising profound questions about the meaning of marriage and of the family.

These are perilous waters for a Tory-led government. The talk is all of raising taxes: no one seems willing to make the case for lowering them. The mindset is anti-aspirational, the impact anti-family — yet the projected revenues are a drop in the bucket. Mr. Cameron should think very carefully about the un-Conservative course on which he seems set.

The Globe and Mail, Toronto, on Russian elections:

The Putinian universe appears to be unfolding as planned. Vladimir Putin has been elected to a third term as president. His loyal place-holder, Dmitri Medvedev, will either become prime minister, or be dispensed with — his services having been rendered, the spirit of Russia's constitutional term limits duly thwarted.

Yet the victory tears shed by Mr. Putin aside, this is a dangerous moment for Russia.

December's parliamentary elections were characterized by election-rigging that provoked demonstrations across the country. The bar was raised for the presidential vote. Unfortunately, Mr. Putin has not successfully scaled it. His re-election by a large margin was secured on the basis of conditions "clearly skewed in favor of one candidate," as observers from the Organization for Co-operation and Security in Europe dryly put it. This only serves to emphasize the perception of a prearranged handover of power.

A managed democracy, as the Putinists would practice it, is not a true democracy. What has become clear these past three months, as the demonstrations have continued, is that Russians themselves agree that this is not an acceptable approach to democracy — and a democracy is what Russia nominally is and aspires to be. It is why, for example,

the country — unlike China — is a member of the G8 group of industrialized democracies.

In responding to the result, the White House moved delicately, on the one hand, congratulating the Russian people for voting in large numbers, on the other expressing concern over the conduct of the vote... The international community, including Canada, is in an awkward position. It needs

to censure Mr. Putin, yet should do so in a way that appeals to his better angels, should they exist.

Now that Mr. Putin has full control, he can afford to rule with a looser grip. He should not prevent a Russian spring, but lead it.

China Daily, Beijing, on Premier Wen's report on government work:

On government work to deputies of the national legislature and members of the political advisory body has struck a chord in and out of Beijing's Great Hall of the People because of its non-sense approach.

But his modest review of past achievements, some of which are more than praiseworthy on such an occasion, displays the government's awareness of the difficulty of sustaining them.

Given Mr. Wen's famous remark that "confidence is more precious than gold" and people's rising expectations, it is no surprise that his report should seek to inspire confidence in attaining quality growth. The continuously widening coverage of basic medical insurance and social security services, as well as the substantially raised national poverty line, have encouraged higher hopes about what the government has to offer.

That the national target of gross domestic product growth for 2012 is set at 7.5 percent, the lowest since 2005, is the result of external and internal pressures... But this is in line with the national leadership's preference for quality growth. And a slowdown would provide the opportunity for addressing the structural contradictions as well as the imbalance, disharmony and unsustainability...

The Jerusalem Post on Israel's moral obligation to protect itself from Iran:

U.S. President Barack Obama has made it clear on numerous occasions that with regard to stopping Iran, "all options are on the table." In recent days his message has become more emphatic.

In a speech March 4 to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, he declared that his policy was not to contain Iran, it was "to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon." As Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu noted in his speech to AIPAC, "Israel has the same policy. 'We are determined to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. We leave all options on the table. And containment is definitely not an option.'"

Nevertheless, U.S. and Israeli interests are not identical. The U.S. timetable for waiting to see if increasingly stringent sanctions coupled with diplomacy and covert actions seriously delay Iran's nuclear program stretches beyond the time frame in which we in Israel feel it is imperative to act in our own defense.

True, the U.S. president assured Israel of his support. At the same time, our prime minister has an obligation to his own people. And that obligation includes exercising Israel's sovereignty and military might in a way that best protects the citizens of the Jewish state.

Lance case leaves troubling questions unanswered

On March 6, more than 14 months after I was arrested for a crime I didn't commit, the Department of Motor Vehicles finally agreed to return my driver's license to me — acknowledging what was clear on Nov. 15, 2011, when Santa Barbara County Superior Court Judge Brian Hill dropped the charges against me: that I was not guilty of driving under the influence.

From the moment Santa Barbara Police Officer Kasi Beutel put the cuffs on me an hour into New Year's Day 2011, I stated my innocence. But it took all that time for me to be vindicated, because the city, the county and the state have steadfastly defended Officer Beutel. They've not only refused to conduct a complete and honest investigation of her misconduct but collectively defended her to the point where they've spent more time and money prosecuting me than if I had been a predicate felon versus a motorist accused of driving 100th of a percent over the limit.

In the end, it was determined conclusively that I hadn't even done that.

But the most disappointing aspect of both the criminal case dismissal and the set-aside by the DMV was that my attorney, Darryl Genis, and I never got a chance to fully examine the most important questions raised by my illegal arrest — questions I explored in my 13-part series for the News-Press: Did Officer Kasi Beutel frame me and did she engage in a practice in which other innocent drivers were wrongfully arrested for DUI crimes? The evidence I uncovered in the course of my investigation is incredibly troubling.

Evidence that prior to becoming a police officer, Kasi Beutel committed bankruptcy fraud in federal court in the year 2000, that she committed perjury during her divorce proceedings in state court in 2005, and that she suborned the perjury of the very minister who married her in 1999. All of that happened before she put on a uniform. But after that, I found compelling evidence that she not only lied about the number of DUI arrests that won her the Mothers Against Drunk Driving award in 2009 but she regularly went into the field with pre-checked DUI forms evidencing a pre-determined mindset to frame drivers for DUI crimes.

Further and most troubling of all was my finding that in at least six instances, including mine, she witnessed the forged signatures of DUI arrestees on Trombetta blood waivers. These waivers are the "Miranda warnings" of a DUI arrest and by law must be signed by suspects so that they can intelligently waive their rights to a blood test, the most accurate measure of blood-alcohol content. Thus, if an officer like Kasi Beu-

tel is manipulating the Breathalyzer, as I allege she did in my case, she can make an arrest without any independent means of confirming the actual blood-alcohol content. In that case, her credibility means everything.

But as to her willingness to lie, I found multiple instances in which Officer Beutel submitted false information in police reports, including a statement she filed under penalty of perjury in my case: a DS 367 DMV form in which she falsely accused me of making "unsafe turning movements."

That was a lie that she audaciously refused to correct for the DMV. I also found multiple instances in which she failed to turn over evidence exculpatory to defendants, as in the case of Michael Kenny, the man she Tasered during a DUI stop in 2009 whose blood tested below the .08 limit. I found nearly seven minutes missing from an audio recording Officer Beutel had made of that arrest.

The final unanswered questions that we never got to explore go to Officer Beutel's credibility with respect to her many sick leaves. I found that she had filed worker's compensation claims in 2007 and 2009 — getting benefits at taxpayer expense. In the second instance, she claimed that she sustained a "shoulder injury" in the Kenny case when the police report stated "no injury" and that she was "not injured." She then took off 90 days in 2011 during which she twice dodged subpoenas to appear at my DMV hearing, further delaying the process.

As recently as Jan. 9, she filed a sworn declaration, under penalty of perjury, in which she misrepresented her own testimony during a previous hearing in June 2011. Worse, she failed to state that while she was on sick leave, avoiding a subpoena to appear at a Sept. 8, 2011, DMV hearing, she conducted an extensive interview with the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office two days earlier. A recording of that interview, which we obtained, proves that she was healthy and fully able to answer questions at that time.

If DMV hearing examiner Michael Windover had allowed that recording to go into evidence and had not kept Mr. Genis from examining Officer Beutel about it, we could have proven that she committed an additional act of perjury.

I've been covering police misconduct at the local, state and federal levels for more than 30 years and I have never uncovered so much evidence suggesting that a sworn peace officer routinely broke the law in pursuit of her goal of arresting impaired drivers. Nor have I ever found so many agencies so willing to protect that officer in the face of extraordinary evidence that she has repeatedly perjured herself. In my case,

COMMENTARY

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