

# Bitter Brew



January 12, 2008

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The next issue of Capitol Journal will be available on January 19th.

## Top Story

*With state budgets in freefall, 2009 is bound to be a rough ride for the vast majority of governors. For a few, however, the trouble goes well beyond dollars and cents.*

## SNCJ Spotlight

### Govs facing toil and trouble in 2009

**W**ith more than 40 states facing budget deficits, 2009 is already shaping up to be a rough year for the vast majority of governors. For some, however, the trouble goes well beyond dollars and cents.

Without question, no governor's situation is more tenuous than that of ILLINOIS Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D), who is facing both impeachment and federal corruption charges stemming from allegations that he tried to enrich himself by selling President-elect Barack Obama's vacant U.S. Senate





who Obama had tapped to serve as U.S. Commerce Secretary. Although the investigation has been ongoing since last August, Richardson abruptly withdrew his name on January 4, saying the inquiry would have “forced an untenable delay in the confirmation process.” Richardson, who plans to remain in office in NEW MEXICO, insisted he would eventually be cleared of any wrongdoing.

Even if that happens, however, the circumstances of Richardson’s sudden withdrawal may harm his long-term chances of serving in the Obama administration. Obama initially left the door open, saying “I look forward to [Richardson’s] future service to our country and in my administration,” but the President-elect’s transition team and sources inside the Department of Justice have since said they thought that Richardson had played down the importance of the probe and did not reveal that his office and staff could be at risk.

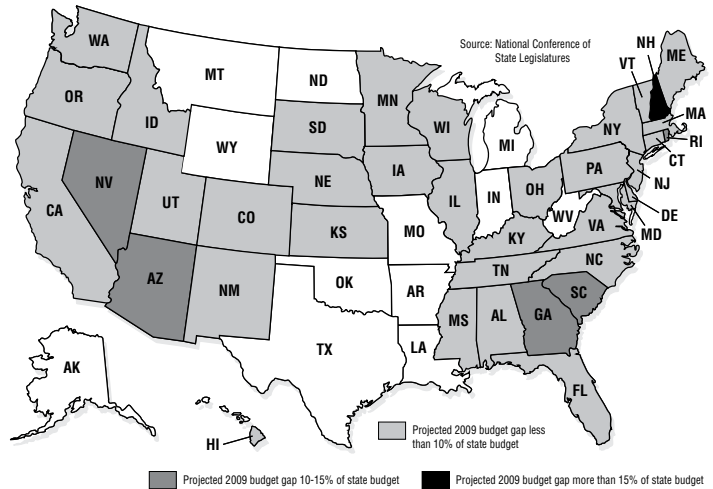
The reception back in Santa Fe may also be a bit chilly, even from fellow Democrats. Lawmakers from both parties seemed prepared to work with Lt. Gov.

**“We’re all surprised — here he is again. He has had his problems with the state senate in the past, and I don’t think that will improve.”**

he is again,” said state Sen. Dede Feldman (D). “He has had his problems with the state senate in the past, and I don’t think that will improve.”

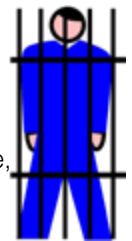
Others worry that Richardson’s pullout leaves the Land of Enchantment with precious little clout inside the Beltway, particularly with the recent retirement of powerful six-term Republican Sen. Pete Domenici, a fixture on the Senate Budget

## Bird’s eye view



### IL not the most corrupt state

When federal authorities arrested ILLINOIS Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) last month for allegedly auctioning off Barack Obama’s U.S. Senate seat, Robert Grant, the head of the FBI’s Chicago office, said of ILLINOIS, “If it isn’t the most corrupt state in the United States, it’s certainly one hell of a competitor.” According to Department of Justice data, however, on a per-capita basis, the Prairie State ranks only 18th in public corruption convictions won by the federal government between 1998 and 2008. NORTH DAKOTA actually tops those rankings, with 8.3 convictions per 100,000 residents, followed by ALASKA (7.5 per 100,000) and LOUISIANA (7.3). The rankings don’t take into account corruption cases handled by state law enforcement or federal cases that didn’t result in a conviction.





Committee. All three of the state’s seats in the House of Representatives are now held by freshmen.

Janet Murguía, president of the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic advocacy group, also expressed disappointment in Richardson, the nation’s most prominent Mexican-American office holder. “A lot of our community sees their hopes and dreams reflected in what Bill Richardson has been able to do,” Murguía said. “We hold him out as a role model for our young people.”

Those close to Richardson say he hasn’t given up hope that he will recover from his current situation and eventually return to the national stage. His loss, meanwhile, could be another governor’s gain. At least two current governors — Jennifer Granholm of MICHIGAN and Kathleen Sebelius of KANSAS — have previously been mentioned as possibilities for an Obama cabinet position. Last week, however, both said they intend to stay in their jobs through the end of their current terms. (CHICAGO TRIBUNE, WALL STREET JOURNAL, NEW YORK TIMES, WASHINGTON POST, TOPEKA CAPITAL-JOURNAL, ASSOCIATED PRESS, SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN, NEW MEXICO INDEPENDENT)

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

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## Budget & taxes

**B**UDGET GAMBIT DERAILED IN CA: Last month, in a special session called by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R), CALIFORNIA’s Democratic legislative leaders hatched a bold plan 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 Democrats maintained that with the Republicans having repeatedly blocked their budget and tax proposals, the plan was the only way to break the budget deadlock that had already dragged on for over a month since the start of the special session.

Taxpayer groups and Republican lawmakers threatened legal action to block the Democrats’ move. (They followed through with that threat last Tuesday, filing suit in the Third Appellate District Court of Appeal.) Schwarzenegger also threatened to veto the \$18 billion package, although not because he had a problem with the Democrats’ legal maneuver, but because he said it didn’t do enough to stimulate the economy and cut spending. He wanted the Democrats to waive the state’s environmental review process for a dozen transportation projects to help speed their completion and grant him authority to engage private companies to undertake public infrastructure projects.



The Democrats proceeded to pass the plan in both houses on party-line votes but held off on sending it to the governor to allow them to negotiate a deal. But when those talks broke down last week — the Democrats arguing that the governor’s environmental review requests would set a bad legal precedent and that the public works privatization idea would give him too much power, and Schwarzenegger accusing the Democrats of being unwilling to buck their union supporters and other liberal interests — the Democrats decided to call the governor’s

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Upcoming elections</b> 1/8/2008 - 1/29/2009</p> <p>01/17/2009 <b>Louisiana Special Election</b> Senate District 3</p>
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**“It was wishful thinking on [the Democrats’] part. The governor said three weeks ago that he would veto this budget, and they have sent to him the exact same budget, which he had said he would veto.”**

bluff and sent the legislation to his desk. He wasn’t bluffing; within hours he made good on his veto threat.

“It was wishful thinking on [the Democrats’] part,” said Schwarzenegger spokesman Aaron McLearn. “The governor said three weeks ago that he would veto this budget, and they have sent to him the exact same budget, which he had said he would veto.”

The Democrats said they would continue to work with the governor to try and revive the legislation. With the state facing the prospect of running out of money as early as next month and having to issue IOUs to state workers, vendors and even taxpayers awaiting refunds, there aren’t a lot of other options.

“This is the only package that has the votes in the Legislature,” said Assembly Speaker Karen Bass (D). (SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE)

**BUDGETS IN BRIEF:** Revenue collections in **PENNSYLVANIA** fell short of projections for the sixth month in a row, increasing the budget deficit for the current fiscal year to \$814.5 million. Tax collections in December were \$157 million short (PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE). • Revenue collections were down \$100 million in **FLORIDA**, which will likely push the state’s budget deficit to \$2.4 billion (ST. PETERSBURG TIMES). • In his State of the State address last week, **NORTH DAKOTA** Gov. John Hoeven (R) laid out a plan for his state’s anomalous \$1.2 billion budget surplus. He proposed setting aside \$600 million for a rainy day and using \$400 million “to provide hard working North Dakotans with real tax relief” (MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO). • **NEW HAMPSHIRE** has requested federal permission to set up a toll demonstration project on Interstate 93 near the **MASSACHUSETTS** border. If federal regulators and state lawmakers approve of the idea, tolls will probably start being collected in four years (BOSTON HERALD).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

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# Politics & leadership

**N**EW SPEAKER COMING TO TX HOUSE: The iron-fisted reign of TEXAS House Speaker Tom Craddick (R) is coming to an end. Shortly before he was scheduled to meet with the House Republican Caucus last week to map out a strategy to claim his fourth term as Speaker, Craddick informed his colleagues he was bowing out of the race.

“He told me he had withdrawn and released everyone,” said Rep. Will Hartnett, (R), referring to Craddick’s decision to free his backers to support another candidate. Hartnett added that Craddick is likely to step down only as speaker and serve out his new two-year term as a House member.

The surprise move by TEXAS’ longest serving Republican statewide elected officeholder, who fended off a coup attempt at the end of the 2007 session during which he claimed “absolute” authority to resist challenges to his rule, was precipitated by a letter circulated by Rep. Joe Straus (R) minutes before Craddick’s strategy meeting stating that 88 of the chamber’s 150 members had pledged to support Straus’ bid for the speakership when the Legislature convened on Jan. 13.

Two days earlier Straus had become the favored candidate of the Republican ABC — for “Anybody But Craddick” — coalition following a closed-door meeting, but only 11 GOP House members had publicly declared their support for him at that time. Within 48 hours, however, the moderate Republican, who served in the presidential administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, managed to win the support of five more Republicans and 72 Democrats, who have become more of a factor since the November elections narrowed the Republican’s majority in the chamber to 76-74.

With the race effectively wrapped up, Straus pledged to open up the House and allow whichever party has the strongest argument and the most votes to carry the day, a sharp contrast to the approach taken by Craddick, who pushed through a controversial mid-decade congressional redistricting plan after becoming Speaker in 2003.

Observers say with the change in leadership, issues such as abortion, immigration and school vouchers are likely to be set aside, and those like green energy, education funding and ethics reform may finally be taken up.

“The dynamic of the issues seems to have moved towards the middle,” said Fred Hill, a veteran GOP House member who retired this year. “There won’t be the effort to force the issues that are out on the edges, like vouchers for instance.”

But Straus’ election isn’t a foregone conclusion. Fifty-five Craddick backers have pledged their support for Rep. John Smithee (R) and hope GOP grass-roots efforts will return wayward Republicans to the fold.

“There will be tremendous pressure on Republicans to come back to where they belong,” said Hartnett. (STAR-TELEGRAM [FORT WORTH], DALLAS MORNING NEWS)



## DEMOCRATS SECURE LEADERSHIP OF

**NY SENATE:** After two months of negotiations, the NEW YORK Senate’s Democratic caucus finally reached an agreement with three dissident Democrats last week, giving the party control of the Senate for the first time in 43 years and the state its first black legislative leader.

The three Democrats, Sens. Pedro Espada Jr., Ruben Díaz and Carl Kruger — known as the “Gang of Three” — had threatened the party’s new 32-30 majority in the chamber when they withheld their support for the presumptive president pro tempore, former minority leader Malcolm Smith (D), in the hope of securing plum leadership posts and a promise that no vote would be taken on legislation to legalize same-sex marriage, which Diaz, a Pentecostal minister, strongly opposes. Last month it appeared the trio had succeeded, but the deal quickly fell apart and control of the chamber was again up for grabs.

Last Tuesday a new deal was struck, one that was somewhat less favorable for the Big Three. Under the earlier agreement the Senate’s top titles would have been divided, with Smith serving as President pro Tempore and Espada serving as Majority Leader, and Kruger would have chaired a finance committee with its own budget. Under the new deal Smith will be both

President and Majority Leader, Espada will be Vice President of the Senate for Urban Policy and Chairman of the Housing Construction and Community Development Committee, and Kruger will become a finance chairman but not of an autonomous committee. Díaz, meanwhile, will lead the Senate’s Aging Committee.

Smith was elected on a party-line vote the following day, but it was clear the accord that made that vote possible was a fragile one. At a press conference announcing the deal, Smith said no policy issues had been resolved in reaching it, while Díaz said the issue of same-sex marriage had been discussed and he was comfortable with the outcome.

Furthermore, Díaz’s decision to support Smith had apparently required considerable persuasion by his son, Assemblyman Ruben Díaz Jr. (D), and Assemblyman Carl E. Heastie (D) of the senator’s Bronx district.

“You want to thank anyone, thank my son and Carl Heastie,” the elder Díaz said. “My son is my son, my blood, he twist my arm, he come in, he slapped my face a few times.”

## The week in session

**States in Regular Session:** AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NY, OH, OR, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, US, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY

**States in Recess:** KY, PA

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

**States in Perfunctory Session:** IL 2007-08 Special Sessions “a”-“z”

**States Currently Prefiling or Drafting for 2009:** AK, AL, FL, MD, NM, NV, OK, SD, TN, TX, VA, WY

**States Projected to Adjourn:** IL 2007-08, NJ 2008(First Year)

**States in Special Session Projected to Adjourn:** FL “a”, IL 2007-08 “a”-“z”

**States Adjourned in 2009:** DC 2007-08, MA 2007-08, MI 2007-08, NY 2007-08, OH 2007-08.

**State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2009:** CT “a”

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(session information current as of 1/9/2009)  
Source: State Net database



And when reporters asked Díaz if he would vote with the Democrats on most issues, he smiled and said, “It depends on the issue.” (NEW YORK TIMES, ASSOCIATED PRESS, NEWSDAY)

**NOTABLE NEW LAWS TAKE EFFECT:**

When the clock struck 12 a.m. on Jan. 1, a slew of new laws took effect across the country. In CALIFORNIA, for instance, it became illegal to text-message while driving. And in OREGON, you can no longer smoke at bars, bowling alleys or bingo halls, locations exempted from a workplace smoking ban passed in 2001.

An ILLINOIS law prohibiting pay-to-play politics attracted national attention, thanks to Gov. Rod Blagojevich’s (D) alleged efforts to rake in as much campaign money as possible before that law took effect. PENNSYLVANIA went from being a state with one of the weakest open-records laws in the country to a state with one of the strongest, with its new “Right to Know” law, stemming from the scandalous late night vote legislators held in 2005 granting themselves a hefty pay raise without public comment or debate.

Several states toughened their drunken driving laws just in time to punish overindulgent New Year’s Eve revelers. CALIFORNIA will now impound the car of anyone found to have a blood-alcohol level of 0.01 percent who has a previous drunk-driving conviction, and ALASKA, ILLINOIS, SOUTH CAROLINA and WASHINGTON will require those convicted of drunk driving to install breathalyzer ignition devices in their cars.

Also on the criminal justice front, the “Cindy Bischof” law took effect in ILLINOIS. Named for a woman who’d sought GPS tracking of her ex-boyfriend before being murdered by him, the law allows judges to order those who violate restraining orders to wear such tracking devices. School officials in CALIFORNIA, meanwhile, now have greater authority to suspend or expel students for cyberbullying. And in MAINE, it’s now a felony to force someone into the commercial sex trade, which includes stripping, pornography and prostitution.

On a more positive note, veterans with license plates designating them as Purple Heart or Medal of Honor recipients, Pearl Harbor survivors or former POWs, can now park in metered spots in CALIFORNIA for free. (STATELINE)

## 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 2009 Prefiles last week:** 2,319
- Number of 2008 Intros last week:** 4
- Number of 2009 Intros last week:** 5,373
- Number of 2008 Session Enacted/Adopted last week:** 122
- Number of 2009 Session Enacted/Adopted last week:** 146
- Number of 2008 Prefiles to date:** 21,697
- Number of 2009 Prefiles to date:** 11,614
- Number of 2008 Intros to date:** 93,701
- Number of 2009 Intros to date:** 5,642
- Number of 2008 Session Enacted/Adopted overall to date:** 28,872
- Number of 2009 Session Enacted/Adopted overall to date:** 157

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(measures current as of 1/8/2009)  
Source: State Net database



**POLITICS IN BRIEF:** Democrat Al Franken was officially certified by **MINNESOTA**'s independent canvassing board as the winner of the U.S. Senate seat held by Republican Norm Coleman by 225 votes out of the 2.9 million cast. Speaking through his lawyers, Coleman said the board's recount was flawed and that he would challenge it in court (**NEW YORK TIMES**). • In an e-mail to supporters last week, former **FLORIDA** Gov. Jeb Bush (R) announced that he will not seek the U.S. Senate seat that will be vacated by Republican Mel Martinez next year. Friends said Bush decided that right now it would be best to forgo the intense national scrutiny and grueling two-year campaign the pursuit of that office would involve (**ST. PETERSBURG TIMES**). • Also in **FLORIDA**, House Speaker Ray Sansom (R) resigned from a six-figure job at Northwest Florida State College last week, bowing to public criticism about tens of millions of dollars he's steered to the school in recent years. Sansom took the position as Vice President for Development at the school on Dec. 1 (**MIAMI HERALD**). • Rep. Terrance Carroll (D) became the first African-American to assume the Speaker's gavel in **COLORADO**'s House of Representatives last week. With Peter Groff (D) already serving as president of the Senate, Carroll's election makes **COLORADO** the first state to elect African-Americans to the top leadership posts of both chambers (**DENVER POST**). • A report released Jan. 6 by Make Voting Work, a project of the Pew Center of the States, indicated that many states need to improve their systems to make sure military personnel stationed overseas can vote. The report found that 16 states don't give overseas military personnel enough time to do so (**STATELINE**).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

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# Governors

**PATRICK LAUNCHES DUAL MA HEALTH CAMPAIGNS:** Saying that rising premiums threaten to harm families and businesses and doom the Bay State's groundbreaking universal healthcare program, **MASSACHUSETTS** Gov. Deval Patrick (D) said his administration is considering using state insurance regulations to block excessive healthcare premiums. Patrick convened a panel of senior administration figures last week to coordinate new and existing cost containment efforts, which he said should produce action by summer. Patrick said new legislation could also be part of the mix.

"The increases at this rate over time [are] just not sustainable, not for families, not to business, not for government," Patrick said. Ideas under consideration include reforming the payment system to compensate hospitals for patient outcomes, rather than for the number of procedures or visits.



Patrick also noted a healthcare cost containment bill he signed in August, which created a payment reform commission he said will hold its first meeting this week. But Senate President Therese Murray (D), who championed the measure, expressed frustration that Patrick has been slow to appoint members to that commission, which she said was supposed to start meeting last September. “I don’t think the governor needs to reinvent the wheel,” Murray said. “We established this commission on healthcare payment reform because it was already evident to us that MASSACHUSETTS had higher healthcare costs than everybody else.”

Two days later, the governor also announced a campaign to require all major restaurant chains to prominently post the calorie counts for all their offerings. The postings could be either at the counter or on the menu. The plan also calls for public schools to measure the height and weight of first-, fourth-, seventh-, and 10th-graders and calculate whether a child is overweight. Findings would be sent home with students along with detailed advice on eating better and exercising more, with the goal of reducing the incidence of health conditions like type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol. The measures need approval from the state Public Health Council, an appointed board of doctors, consumer advocates, and medical leaders that generally follows the recommendations of the administration. If endorsed, they would go into effect next fall. (BOSTON GLOBE)

**GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: FLORIDA** Gov. Charlie Crist (R) proposed a \$10 million plan to have the Sunshine State make low-interest loans to small and medium-sized companies that show good financial potential but which are having trouble acquiring growth capital from traditional lenders. Crist asked a bevy of business executives to contact state senators in support of his plan, which would provide loans of up to \$250,000 to companies of 10 to 99 employees that are ready to expand if they can get access to capital (TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT). • **PRESIDENT-ELECT BARACK OBAMA** named **VIRGINIA** Gov. Tim Kaine (D) as the new chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Kaine will serve in a limited capacity in 2009 while completing his term as governor (NEW YORK TIMES). • **NORTH CAROLINA** Gov. Mike Easley (D) and eight other statewide elected officials agreed to speed up more than \$740 million in government building projects in the Tar Heel State. Easley said that moving the projects along quickly will create 25,000 new jobs (WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL). • **SOUTH CAROLINA** Gov. Mark Sanford (R) signed off on a \$146 million federal loan request that will allow the state to continue paying unemployment benefits at least through March. Sanford and lawmakers also called for an audit of the state agency that manages the benefits fund (THE STATE [COLUMBIA]).

## Upcoming stories

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

- **Coping with Recession**
- **No Child Left Behind**
- **A view from Europe**

— *Compiled by Rich Ehisen*

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# Hot issues

**B** **USINESS: OHIO** Gov. Ted Strickland (D) vetoes HB 196, which would have authorized income tax credits for investments in motion pictures produced in the Buckeye State (DAYTON DAILY NEWS). • Still in **OHIO**, Strickland signs HB 79, legislation that preserves the state's current employer group rating system for workers compensation insurance (STATE NET). • Also in **OHIO**, Strickland signs SB 269, which bars musical groups from billing themselves as a widely recognized group unless the current lineup contains at least one of that band's original members (STATE NET).

**CRIME & PUNISHMENT: OHIO** Gov. Ted Strickland (D) signs House Bill 648, which creates civil and criminal penalties for violating rules regarding access to personal information in state databases (DAYTON DAILY NEWS). • Still in **OHIO**, Strickland signs HB 215, making it illegal to sell or possess the hallucinogenic herb Salvia Divinorum (STATE NET).

**EDUCATION:** The **MISSISSIPPI** House endorses HB 290, legislation that would restore \$17.2 million in higher education funding cut last year by Gov. Haley Barbour (R). The measure moves to the Senate (DAILY JOURNAL [TUPELO]). • **OREGON** officials announce a plan to streamline the transfer of licensing for new technology developed at Beaver State universities and make it ready for commercial use in the private sector in order to help create new jobs. Attorney General John Kroger said a draft of the plan will be ready by the end of this year's legislative session (OREGON PUBLIC BROADCASTING).

**ENVIRONMENT:** President George W. Bush designates almost 200,000 square miles of American-controlled Pacific Ocean islands, reefs, surface waters and sea floor — an area larger than **WASHINGTON** and **OREGON** combined — as marine national monuments. The move, which is an extension of Bush's 2006 designation of the 139,000-square-mile Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the northwest **HAWAIIAN** Islands, does not require Congressional approval (NEW YORK TIMES). • Ten Mid-Atlantic states sign a pact to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by developing alternative transportation fuels that are cleaner than unleaded gasoline or diesel. The participating states include **PENNSYLVANIA, CONNECTICUT, DELAWARE, MAINE, MARYLAND, MASSACHUSETTS, NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, RHODE ISLAND** and **VERMONT** (PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE). • Federal officials reject a request to grant protection under the Endangered Species Act to 270 plants and animals across **OKLAHOMA, ARIZONA, TEXAS** and **NEW MEXICO**. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the petition did



not contain enough information regarding specific threats to the rejected species. The agency did agree to consider granting protection to another 205 plants and animals (OKLAHOMAN [OKLAHOMA CITY]).

**HEALTH & SCIENCE:** Acting **NEW JERSEY** Gov. Richard Codey (D) signs SB 467, legislation that requires health insurance providers to cover the cost of hearing aids for children. The benefit is capped at \$1,000 per aid every 24 months. Codey signed the measure while Gov. Jon Corzine (D) was away for the holidays (NEWARK STAR-LEDGER). • **CALIFORNIA** insurance regulators rescind over \$12 million in fines levied against health insurance provider Blue Shield after the company agrees to reinstate almost 700 policy holders the company had dropped after they got sick. The state also dropped a pending lawsuit over the matter. Blue Shield additionally agreed to reimburse the consumers whose coverage was canceled for medical expenses they paid out of pocket (LOS ANGELES TIMES). • Still in **CALIFORNIA**, the state Supreme Court rules that medically insured patients may not be billed for emergency care that their health plans refuse to pay. The court said that “balance billing” unfairly places consumers in the middle of a dispute between ER doctors and health maintenance organizations, or HMOs (SACRAMENTO BEE). • **OHIO** Gov. Ted Strickland (D) signs SB 203, which establishes standards for qualified pharmacy technicians and requires them to undergo a criminal background check. The bill also establishes penalties for certain activities, including compounding, packaging and preparing a drug by someone who is not a pharmacist, pharmacy intern, or qualified pharmacy technician (STATE NET).

**HOMELAND SECURITY:** The federal Department of Homeland Security announces a plan for a “surge” of civilian and perhaps even military law enforcement along the nation’s border with Mexico should escalating violence between warring drug cartels in that country spill into the United States. DHS officials said the plan would involve aircraft, armored vehicles and special teams to converge on border trouble spots, with the size and type of the force depending on the scale of the problem (NEW YORK TIMES).

**SOCIAL POLICY:** The **CALIFORNIA** Supreme Court unanimously rules that three parishes that left the Episcopal Church over its ordination of gay ministers cannot retain ownership of their church buildings and property. The high court ruled that while the churches held deeds to the land in their own names, the Episcopal Church of the United States allows parishes to hold property only in trust for the greater church. The plaintiffs are considering an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. The ruling comes a month after a similar case in **VIRGINIA** ended with the court

## In case you missed it

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.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at [http://www.statenet.com/capitol\\_journal/12-22-2009/html](http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/12-22-2009/html)



backing the property rights of 11 breakaway parishes. That case is already under appeal (LOS ANGELES TIMES, WASHINGTON POST). • The **ARIZONA** License Plate Commission approves a request from anti-abortion groups to get their own state plate with the message “choose life.” State transportation officials said the specialty plates could be available within two months (ARIZONA DAILY STAR [TUCSON]). • **OHIO** Gov. Ted Strickland (D) signs HB 280, which would require clinics that perform abortions to post signs noting that the procedure is voluntary. The bill also increases the penalty for domestic violence against a pregnant woman (STATE NET).

**POTPOURRI:** A federal court withdraws its own decision to strike down a **MICHIGAN** law that restricts what drivers may hang on their vehicle’s rear view mirror. The court’s original ruling said the law was unconstitutional because it gave police too much leeway to determine whether objects blocked a driver’s vision. The court did not say why it changed its decision (DETROIT FREE PRESS). • **OHIO** Gov. Ted Strickland (D) vetoes HB 649, which would have used the Buckeye State’s rainy day fund for bonuses for veterans of the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War and the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan (DAYTON DAILY NEWS). • Still in **OHIO**, Strickland signs HB 320, legislation that requires a vehicle booster seat for children between the ages of 4 and 8 and shorter than 4 feet, 9 inches tall (TOLEDO BLADE).

— Compiled by *RICH EHISEN*

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# Once around the statehouse lightly

**CROSSED WIRES:** When WASHINGTON Gov. Christine Gregoire begged out of a speech last week at a forum sponsored by the Associated Press, the news agency dutifully passed along the gov’s reason for her absence: she was out of state. The problem was that Gregoire’s people wouldn’t say where she was, which the AP also noted. As the Seattle Times reports, that lack of specificity, coupled with a sighting of her on a plane bound for Washington D.C., set the local political blogs abuzz with speculation that she had dashed off to the nation’s capital to accept a job with President-elect Barack Obama’s incoming administration. Alas, no such job exists. Gregoire actually was in D.C., but only as a brief stopover until joining a few fellow governors on a trip to visit troops in Iraq. A surprised Gregoire apologized for the hubbub.



**REALLY CROSSED WIRES:** If you happen to be out of work in ALABAMA these days, don't count on the state's unemployment benefits hot line being much help. As the *Montgomery Advertiser* reports, the toll-free number the state Department of Industrial Relations set up to help unemployed Alabamans apply for their benefits has instead been routing calls to private residents in CALIFORNIA, which, as might be expected, has proven quite annoying for people in both states. Heart of Dixie officials say they are working hard to resolve the problem — AT&T officials say it is just a glitch — but so far have not rooted out the source of the trouble. One positive: The matter has yet to cost anyone their job, which is good since it might necessitate them using the hot line.

**THE MORE THINGS CHANGE,** the more they stay the same. Or so it would appear with ILLINOIS Gov. Rod Blagojevich. As the *Chicago Tribune* reports, the embattled governor was once a Golden Gloves boxer, though one known more for his relentless self-confidence than for his pugilistic skills. The Tribune recently published photos taken of a smiling, winking 18-year-old Blago moments before a bout, along with some reflections on the moment by the man who took the pictures. And what was photographer Richard Younker's take on the future gov? "I saw him there and said, 'This is definitely not somebody I'm going to photograph.'" But Younker relented when Blagojevich asked him to snap a few shots, the only fighter to actually request that his photo be taken. Younker ultimately developed even stronger feelings about the future gov, saying "this guy's a hustler."

**SPACE RACE:** In most statehouses, nothing says "majority party" quite like the size and location of a lawmaker's office. Things are no different in the ultra-partisan CALIFORNIA Legislature, where this year Dems, long the ruling party under the Sacramento dome, not only increased their total number of seats but also expanded their dominance in Capitol office space. As reported by *Capitol Weekly*, the average Democratic Assemblymember's digs come in at 1,082 feet, significantly more than the 703 feet their GOP counterparts receive. Senate Republicans fare only slightly better, garnering an average of 902 square feet, still a pittance compared to the 1,117 feet Dems average. Those figures don't include the vastly more spacious digs afforded legislative leaders, but they do account for the 391-foot Assembly office currently occupied by freshman Republican Jeff Miller, a space known as "The Doghouse."

— By RICH EHISEN



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