

Whittling away at Medicaid



January 24, 2005

Budget & taxes	
Pataki proposes three-pronged budget attack	6
Politics & leadership	
TX legislature lets in sunshine	8
Governors	
Court case begins in WA gov battle	10
Across state lines	4
Hot issues	13
Once around the statehouse lightly	16

Top Story

Budgets are healing, but governors know fiscal troubles are never far off. Last week, governors sought safety in numbers as they tried to maintain the flow of Medicaid funding and Canadian drug imports.

SNCJ Spotlight

Governors team up to fight potential cuts

When the going gets tough, the tough get partners. At least that is the way many state governors are handling some of their most critical issues so far this year, as many chiefs of state have banded together to take on the Bush administration and the world. At the crux of their group effort is the hope of protecting federal Medicaid funding while preserving the ability to import Canadian prescription drugs.

While most of Washington was focused on the president's inaugural pomp and circumstance last week, a large number of governors from both parties spent time sequestered behind closed doors planning a strategy for handling what many of them fear will be a sharp cut in federal funding for Medicaid in 2006. The group included Republican governors Mike Huckabee of ARKANSAS, Dirk Kempthorne of IDAHO, Mike Rounds of SOUTH DAKOTA, Kenny Guinn of NEVADA and Mitt Romney of MASSACHUSETTS, while MICHIGAN Gov. Jennifer Granholm, IOWA Gov. Tom Vilsack, VIRGINIA Gov. Mark Warner, WISCONSIN Gov. Jim Doyle and PENNSYLVANIA Gov. Ed Rendell were the Democrats in attendance.

The governors main fear is that President Bush is planning to shrink the federal budget deficit by shifting a larger portion of Medicaid's approximate \$300 billion annual cost to states. That possibility has governors, most of whom came into office during a national economic malaise that is just now beginning to ease, very concerned. A recently released report by the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) notes that for fiscal 2005, state Medicaid costs are expected to again climb by 12 percent — the third consecutive year of a double digit increase — and that long term Medicaid spending is expected to grow by a steady 8 to 9 percent, a figure far beyond expected state revenue growth. The report also revealed that for the first time, Medicaid spending is now a larger part of total state spending than elementary and secondary education combined. NGA Executive Director Raymond C. Scheppach said that kind of cost escalation is a major drag on states still struggling to achieve full economic recovery.

“It's important to remember that we have just come through a tremendously difficult fiscal period, one in which we are only now beginning to see relief. The light at the end of the tunnel is beginning to appear; unfortunately, it's a long tunnel. Are states better off than they were a couple years ago? Certainly. Are they where they want to be or where they should be? No way, and that is attributable to the rising health care costs.”

The Week in Session

Regular Session:

AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, GA, HI, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, US, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY

Projected Special Session: WV

Skeleton Session: OH

In Recess: KY

Currently Prefiling (Drafts for 2005): AL, FL, NV, OK, WY

Projected to Adjourn: CA “a”, WI “a”

Adjourned in 2005:

DC “z”, IL “z”, MA “z”, NY “z”

Special Session Adjourned in 2005: DE “c”, FL “a”, MD “a”

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions
Source: State Net, 1/21/05

The D.C. trip is only the latest attempt to get Washington’s attention. In early December, Governors Warner and Huckabee also sent a letter to Congress urging the lawmakers to work with them toward Medicaid reform “that will create savings for both states and the federal government.” The letter also noted the disparity between federal Medicaid funding and actual state-level program costs, saying, “Medicaid per capita spending has not exceeded approximately 4.5 percent per year, substantially below the growth rate of private health insurance premiums, which have averaged 12.5 percent per year for the last three years.” Huckabee and Warner went on to say that “Maintaining the status quo is not acceptable. However, it is equally unacceptable in any deficit reduction strategy to simply shift federal costs to the states, as Medicaid continues to impose severe strains on state budgets.”

Whether or not governors are successful in staving off federal funding cuts is yet to be determined in the halls of Congress and the White House. What will happen is anybody’s guess, but what is not likely is a repeat of the \$20 billion block grant Washington sent to states in 2003, half of which was earmarked specifically to cover Medicaid costs.

Meanwhile, another bipartisan group of governors — MINNESOTA Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R), Wisconsin’s Doyle, KANSAS Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D), UTAH Gov. John Huntsman Jr. (R), NORTH DAKOTA Gov. John Hoeven (R) and MAINE Gov. John Baldacci (D) — also sent a letter to Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin asking him not to prohibit the sale of approximately \$1 billion in prescription drugs to Americans. Spearheaded by Pawlenty, the letter claimed that cutting off the prescription sales would be catastrophic to Americans who have come to depend on the less expensive medications, saying, “We believe it is imperative that the Canadian government realize the restriction of prescription drug supplies could mean the difference between life and death for many Americans.”

Doyle and ILLINOIS Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) also lobbied President Bush earlier this month, asking him to discourage Canadian officials from moving ahead with any drug restrictions. But based on comments of late from both Martin and Canadian Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh, these arguments are not likely to prevent them from limiting across-the-border prescription drug sales. Dosanjh made his feelings very clear last week, saying, “Canada cannot be the drugstore to the United States.” Martin has been under heavy pressure from seniors groups for almost a year to halt the diversion of prescription medication to America. He is expected to announce new guidelines in February. (STATELINE.ORG, LANSING STATE JOURNAL, ASSOCIATED PRESS, PRESS HERALD [PORTLAND], LAWRENCE JOURNAL WORLD, NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION)

— By *RICH EHISEN*



Across state lines

Most state math & English standards not making the grade

With the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act in January 2002, the quality of statewide standards for K-12 education became more important than ever. This is particularly true in math, reading and English language arts. While states have improved in some areas, they have also stagnated in others, according to a pair of new studies from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, a Washington D.C.-based non-profit organization that advocates for national education reform.

The studies are separated into math and English categories, with states receiving a grade, grade point average and ranking based on education standards in each area. For the math study, states were judged by the standards of clarity, content, sound mathematical reasoning and the absence of negative features, with content accounting for 40 percent of each state's total score. In the English analysis, state standards were evaluated through 34 criteria organized into six major categories, with each being converted to a 4-point scale. The lone exception was IOWA, which has no statewide standards.

Only three states — CALIFORNIA, INDIANA and MASSACHUSETTS — received A grades in the math study. Those three were joined by ALABAMA and LOUISIANA in earning top grades in the English standards category. Overall, 29 states received either a D or F grade in math, while eight states earned similar grades in English. The accompanying chart shows how each state fared in both categories. To review both studies in their entirety, please visit <http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/global/index.cfm>.

— By *RICH EHISEN*

The state of state math & English standards, 2005

State	Math			English		
	GPA	grade	rank	GPA	grade	rank
Alabama	2.97	B	4	3.64	A	3
Alaska	1.32	D	32	1.68	D	43
Arizona	2.00	C	12	2.91	B	13
Arkansas	0.72	F	43	2.32	C	30
California	3.89	A	1	3.68	A	2
Colorado	1.37	D	28	1.82	C	40
Connecticut	0.47	F	49	1.09	F	49
Delaware	0.54	F	48	2.05	C	34
Dist. of Columbia	1.37	D	29	2.32	C	30
Florida	0.93	F	41	2.05	C	34
Georgia	2.53	B	6	3.27	B	7
Hawaii	0.43	F	50	1.91	C	38
Idaho	1.10	D	38	2.82	B	16
Illinois	1.80	C	16	3.09	B	11
Indiana	3.82	A	2	3.50	A	5
Iowa	*	*	*	*	*	*
Kansas	0.83	F	42	1.91	C	38
Kentucky	1.80	C	17	1.77	C	41
Louisiana	1.78	C	19	3.59	A	4
Maine	1.35	D	30	2.45	C	26
Maryland	1.77	C	20	2.45	C	26
Massachusetts	3.30	A	3	3.91	A	1
Michigan	2.00	C	9	1.41	D	46
Minnesota	1.67	D	23	3.14	B	9
Mississippi	1.67	D	24	2.82	B	16
Missouri	0.57	F	46	2.36	C	29
Montana	1.00	D	39	0.82	F	50
Nebraska	1.42	D	27	2.27	C	32
Nevada	1.77	C	21	2.77	B	19
New Hampshire	0.70	F	44	2.91	B	13
New Jersey	1.15	D	36	1.95	C	37
New Mexico	2.67	B	5	1.59	D	44
New York	2.08	C	8	2.82	B	16
North Carolina	1.82	C	13	3.05	B	12
North Dakota	1.80	C	18	2.68	C	21
Ohio	1.43	D	26	2.55	C	25
Oklahoma	1.97	C	11	2.64	C	24
Oregon	1.35	D	31	2.77	B	19
Pennsylvania	1.28	D	34	2.68	C	21
Rhode Island	0.67	F	45	2.09	C	33
South Carolina	1.32	D	33	2.91	B	13
South Dakota	1.80	C	14	3.36	B	6
Tennessee	1.70	D	22	1.45	D	45
Texas	1.80	C	15	3.14	B	9
Utah	1.13	D	37	1.73	C	42
Vermont	1.20	D	35	2.41	C	28
Virginia	1.97	C	12	3.23	B	8
Washington	0.57	F	47	1.23	F	48
West Virginia	2.35	C	7	2.68	C	21
Wisconsin	1.50	D	25	2.00	C	36
Wyoming	0.98	F	40	1.27	F	47

Source: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

Notes: *Indicates the state had no standards at the time of this review

Budget & taxes

PATAKI PROPOSES THREE-PRONGED BUDGET ATTACK: Last week, NEW YORK Gov. George E. Pataki (R) unveiled his budget proposal for fiscal year 2006. The \$105.5 billion plan included separate strategies for dealing with the state's three most vexing budget issues: the spiraling cost of Medicaid, enormous transportation funding demands and a court-mandated increase in public education spending. The governor's approach to the troublesome triumvirate? Cut services, borrow heavily and stall for time, respectively. With regard to health care, Pataki took the politically risky approach of recommending \$1 billion in cuts to Medicaid, a move that is likely to embroil him in a tough battle with the health care industry. But observers say the governor could get some aid from counties in that fight, thanks to his proposal to cap local Medicaid costs. To deal with the state's massive transportation needs, Pataki has proposed borrowing \$36.6 billion dollars over five years, funded in part through higher fees for motorists and an increase in the mortgage recording tax. And in response to a court order requiring the state to spend \$1.4 billion more per year on New York City schools, Pataki has recommended increasing aid by only \$280 million. The governor proposed — and failed to find support for — the same stopgap tactic last year. Pataki's bold proposals had political insiders wondering whether they were the last hurrah of a governor planning to step down in two years or the splashy start of a gubernatorial re-election campaign. And lawmakers had something else to worry about; last month the state's highest court severely limited their power to amend the governor's budget. Members of both parties were unsure what that will do to the state's already notoriously dysfunctional budget process. (NEW YORK TIMES)

BUSH FOCUSES ON "PRIORITIES": FLORIDA Gov. Jeb Bush (R) offered up a \$61.6 billion state spending plan last Tuesday that he called a "common-sense budget focused on Florida's priorities." Bush's critics say he was referring to the wealthy residents and businesses that have always supported him, pointing to the plan's \$285 million in tax breaks for those two groups, on top of the \$10.7 billion in cuts he's bestowed on them since taking office in 1999. What is even more alarming to the governor's detractors, however, is that his plan simultaneously recommends only a \$707 million increase in Medicaid spending, well below the \$2 billion needed to maintain the program at its current

level, and likely to force major cuts in nursing-home care, prescription-drug coverage and other services for the program's poor, elderly and disabled enrollees. That dichotomy prompted Sen. Walter "Skip" Campbell (D) to quip, "The governor is once again determined to leave no millionaire behind." But Bush defended his proposed reduction in Medicaid spending, saying, "If we just fund Medicaid without making any effort to reform it, I think we're going to have a bigger hole next year." He was talking specifically about the Medicaid budget; overall, the state is expecting a surplus of as much as \$4.5 billion, driven by tax revenues from a boom in real-estate sales and home reconstruction in the aftermath of last year's hurricanes. And Bush intends to use \$1.1 billion of that surplus for another of his "priorities," one his opponents were less eager to criticize: public education. (ORLANDO SENTINEL)

Upcoming Elections (1/19/2005 - 2/2/2005)

01/25/05 Alabama Special Election
House 065
Senate 024

01/29/05 Louisiana Special Primary
House 096

AK GOV PUMPS OIL COMPANIES "JUST BECAUSE"? ALASKA Gov. Frank Murkowski's (R) State of the State speech last week included an unwelcome surprise for a good portion of the state's key oil industry: a \$150-million-per-year tax increase. The news was a shock even to some lawmakers. "I think that he caught a lot of people off guard," said Rep. Kevin Meyer (R), co-chair of the House Finance Committee. A few were highly critical of the action. A statement released by Rep. Vic Kohring (R) said it was not the way to treat "an industry that has been the center piece of Alaska's economy for a generation." Some speculated that the move might just be a bargaining tool in the ongoing contract negotiations between the governor and the state's three major oil producers, Exxon Mobil, Conoco Phillips and BP. But a spokesperson for the governor denied that was the reason, stating the governor's decision was prompted simply by the fact that some of the state's oil fields weren't being taxed at the rate they should be. That explanation didn't seem to make the move any easier for some lawmakers to understand, however. Sen. Hollis French (D), for example, said, "He didn't have to do it. We're in flush economic times and there's certainly no pressure to balance the state budget this year. It looks like we're going to have a surplus." (ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS, JUNEAU EMPIRE)

BUDGETS IN BRIEF: INDIANA Gov. Mitch Daniels (R) pulled no punches in the State of the State speech he delivered last Tuesday night, saying he aims to save the state from financial "ruin" through \$1 billion in spending

cuts and a tax on wealthy residents. “We have outspent our income year after year,” Daniels said. “We have emptied every coffee can in the back yard and maxed out all the credit cards” (JOURNAL GAZETTE [FORT WAYNE]). • **TENNESSEE** officials are considering the idea of reviving an old fund for “uninsurable” residents if Gov. Phil Bredesen (D) goes ahead with his plan to cut 323,000 from the state’s TennCare program. But Bredesen cautioned that the Tennessee Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan, which was dissolved in 1994 due to rising costs and the launch of TennCare, would be only a limited solution because most people wouldn’t be able to afford the premiums (ASSOCIATED PRESS, COMMERCIAL APPEAL [MEMPHIS]). • In spite of increasing state revenues, **GEORGIA**’s chief health-care official said the state will trim Medicaid and PeachCare, the health coverage program for otherwise uninsured children, and raise the insurance premiums for state workers in order to contain the rising costs of health care (MACON TELEGRAPH).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

Politics & leadership

TEXAS LEGISLATURE LETS IN SUNSHINE: Many of the bills that have passed through the TEXAS Legislature have done so on “voice votes,” with legislators yelling out “yea” or “nay” in chorus and no record of how individual members voted. But that will likely happen a lot less under new rules adopted by the Lone Star State’s House and Senate during their first week in session. The Senate instituted a rule change requiring votes on all substantive legislation and amendments to be recorded. And the House eased one of its restrictions to allow a single representative to call for a formal roll-call vote. (Previously, such a vote had to be requested by three members.) While both chambers will still be able to pass legislation by voice vote, all members will be recorded as having voted with the prevailing side unless they specifically request otherwise. Both chambers also agreed to take measures to make it easier for the public to access members’ voting records on the Legislature’s public Web site. (Currently, getting to that information involves a 21-step process.) Some legislators weren’t entirely happy about the changes. Rep. Will Hartnett (R) balked at the idea that members would now have to “scrutinize every word” of the 1,600 bills and amendments they’ll consider this session “or our opponents in the next election will use it against us.” But fellow Republican House member Rep. Dan



While both sides acknowledged the case will not end here, regardless of the verdict, they were pleased with the selection of Chelan County Superior Court Judge John Bridges to oversee the hearings. Bridges has a solid reputation for being even-handed as well as having past experience in handling election cases like this one. In 2000, Chelan nullified the Wenatchee mayoral election after finding that the winner had not lived in the city for one year as required by law, a ruling the state Supreme Court unanimously affirmed. The opening proceedings were noticeably lacking the two primary figures involved — Gregoire and Rossi. Gregoire spent the day in Olympia, saying “I have left all of this to the lawyers that are representing the Democratic Party, and I am not involved,” while Rossi was busy attending the presidential inauguration in Washington D.C. (SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER)

CORRECTION: The January 10 *State Net Capitol Journal* mistakenly reported that CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) had voiced plans during his Jan. 5 State of the State speech to have the Golden State join other states in buying prescription drugs from Canada. What the governor actually said was that he had authorized “a prescription drug discount card with minimal costs to the state. We will make prescription drugs available to nearly 5 million low-income Californians, at prices competitive with those from Canada.” We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

SPEAKING OF ARNOLD: California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) made a movie career out of playing strong men of action who seldom if ever doubt themselves. Most of those characters were good guys, strong men who meted out justice without the worries of lawyers, judges and juries. Some feel he has brought that same “take no prisoners” mantra to the governor’s office, as evidenced by his two-for-two record in rejecting clemency pleas from death row inmates. The latest was a 61-year-old convicted murderer who was put to death via lethal injection last week after Schwarzenegger dismissed a request to convert his sentence to life imprisonment. Schwarzenegger was unmoved by arguments that the man was mentally impaired and had been a model prisoner for two decades, saying it did not matter because “I expect no less.” While Schwarzenegger has so far been unwilling to bend, his next clemency decision could be a lot tougher. That’s because the next person up for clemency consideration is Stanley “Tookie” Williams, the founder of the notorious Crips street gang of Los Angeles, and a man convicted of murdering at least four people. But in recent years Williams has also become a noted author of children’s books and a 2001 nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize for his jailhouse efforts to reduce gang violence. His story was also

the subject of a television movie, after which Williams' co-author claimed he received more than 40,000 e-mails, many of which allegedly came from street gang members who say his message helped turn them away from gang life. So far, Schwarzenegger has had no comment on any potential clemency request from Williams, although a spokesperson said he judges all requests on a "case-by-case" basis. (SAN DIEGO UNION TRIBUNE)

BIG GAME COULD MEAN BIG TROUBLE IN PA: PENNSYLVANIA Gov. Ed Rendell (D) said he will consider moving his annual budget address if either Pittsburgh or Philadelphia wins the Super Bowl. The big game is on Feb. 6 this year, meaning that should either Keystone State team bring home the Lombardi Trophy, a victory parade would ensue in that city on Feb. 8. Unfortunately, that is also the same day the state constitution mandates he present his spending blueprint for the state. The speech is scheduled for noon, a time when delirious citizens would supposedly be otherwise caught up in the football revelry. Rendell, a former Philadelphia mayor and a rabid Eagles fan who does post-game commentary on the team for Comcast cable, is also contractually obligated to be there for the game should the Eagles make it that far. A spokesperson said no final decisions on a new time have been made. (PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW)

GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: A new poll from the University of **CONNECTICUT** showed an 81 percent approval rate for Gov. M. Jodi Rell's (R) decision not to stop the execution of a convicted serial killer. The poll also found that 58 percent of Granite State residents favor the death penalty (HARTFORD COURANT). • **MONTANA** Gov. Brian Schweitzer (D) introduced a plan to eradicate brucellosis in Yellowstone National Park's bison herd. Schweitzer wants to use public lands to allow bison to freely range while also developing new brucellosis quarantine methods and a matching quarantine facility, all paid for with a combination of federal and state funds (BILLINGS GAZETTE). • **ILLINOIS** Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Cook County State's Attorney Richard Devine opened an investigation into allegations that Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) has traded choice state appointments in exchange for \$50,000 campaign contributions. Blagojevich denies the accusations, which his accuser, Ald. Richard Mell, later retracted (CHICAGO SUN-TIMES).

— By *RICH EHISEN*

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Quote...

"Despite this ruling, we are still married in our hearts, and legally married in Massachusetts."

— **Nancy Wilson, half of a lesbian couple whose attempt to have their MASSACHUSETTS marriage legally recognized in FLORIDA was rejected by the state Supreme Court.**

SOCIAL POLICY: The LOUISIANA Supreme Court unanimously reinstates the anti-gay marriage amendment to the state constitution that was overwhelmingly approved by voters in September. The court's decision overturns a lower court ruling that the ballot measure violated the Pelican State constitution because it covered more than one subject (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS]). • A federal judge upholds a law allowing states to ban same-sex marriages. The ruling tosses out a lawsuit from two FLORIDA women seeking to have their MASSACHUSETTS marriage ceremony legally recognized in the Sunshine State (USA TODAY). • The KANSAS Senate approves a proposed constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage in the Sunflower State. It now moves to the House, where approval means the matter would go before voters for possible ratification in April (LAWRENCE JOURNAL-WORLD). • Supporters of a similar amendment in ARIZONA announce they will forgo working with the Legislature and instead launch a petition drive to get the matter on the November 2006 ballot. Backers will need approximately 183,000 signatures to place the measure before voters (ARIZONA REPUBLIC). • A SOUTH CAROLINA Senate committee endorses legislation that would allow the Ten Commandments to be displayed on Statehouse grounds. The bill also says public funds cannot be used to pay for the display (STATE [COLUMBIA]).

POTPOURRI: The MONTANA Senate votes 49-1 to bar state elected officials who are running for election from spending state funds on public service announcements starring themselves. Senate Bill 16 now goes to the House (BILLINGS GAZETTE). • The ARKANSAS Senate endorses HB 1050, a bill that would grant cost-of-living raises to all Razorback State elected officials. It heads now to Gov. Mike Huckabee (R) (NORTHWEST ARKANSAS NEWS SOURCE). • The WYOMING House votes to adopt the jackalope — a fictional creature that is part jackrabbit and part antelope — as the Equality State's official "mythical" creature. It now hops off to the Senate (BILLINGS GAZETTE). • The VIRGINIA House endorses a measure that would allow the non-profit groups to sell candy, snacks and soft drinks at Old Dominion State polling places. It heads to the Senate (RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

... unquote

"Today we have witnessed a significant victory — for marriage and democracy."

— **Tom Minnery of Focus on Family reacting to the ruling. (USA TODAY)**

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Once around the statehouse lightly

FAMILY AFFAIR I. The political landscape in NEW YORK is always crowded with high-profile, high-power wannabes, but the Democratic primary for attorney general next year may shape up as a bitter battle between political dynasties. That's because, *The New York Times* reports, the two main contenders could be Robert Kennedy Jr, and his soon-to-be-ex brother-in-law, Andrew Cuomo. Any friendship between Kennedy and Cuomo fell apart in 2003 after Cuomo's marriage to Kerry Kennedy evaporated, with full coverage in the tabloids. Not that Kennedy himself would be without political baggage. An environmental lawyer, he, too, is divorced and — more significant — was arrested in SOUTH DAKOTA for possession of heroin some 20 years ago. He subsequently served 800 hours of community service. Just the resume for the state's top cop.

FAMILY AFFAIR II. While Democratic dynasties prepare to mug each other in NEW YORK (see above), Republicans in KANSAS are grumpy over ideology. As the *Lawrence Journal-World* notes, conservative and moderate Republicans in the state Senate are squabbling over everything from committee and leadership posts to bill packages. Moderates downplay the rhubarbs, as well they should. They captured all but one leadership position and stiffed conservatives when it came to choice assignments to the education and budget committees. Now, they can make nice. And Democrats? Chortling from the sidelines.

PLANS FOR THE WEEKEND? The answer to that question would be “guess not” for legislative staffers in MONTANA. According to the *Billings Gazette*, the state's 150 lawmakers have had little light bulbs go off over their heads a record 2,318 times in the 10 days since session began. Each bulb represents an idea that must be drafted into a bill, and that job falls to staff — which also must attend to other committee business. Staff director Lois Menzies issued a plea for moderation on behalf of her beleaguered and overworked colleagues, asking each legislator to identify only his or her top five priorities. That was a polite way of saying, “can the rest of it, folks.” (Also see *Politics & leadership* on pg. 9)

BONDING. In a place as varied as CALIFORNIA, it is assumed that the Legislature will reflect the state's diverse population. So, there is a Latino Caucus, an African-American Caucus, an Asian-Pacific Islander Caucus and a gay-lesbian cau-



cus — to name a few. In years past, the ethnic-based caucusi were homogenously Democratic. But as *Capital Journal* reports, Republicans have elected several Hispanics and Asians of late, including the nation’s first-ever Vietnamese-American legislator (Van Tran of Orange County). Now, those Republicans have applied for membership in the various caucusi — and thus far have been snubbed. Democrats claim they are “open to the idea” but have not as yet acted. The worry? One Republican member would be able to stymie a caucus recommendation on bills — most of which are authored by Democrats.

AND YOU EXPECTED, GIFTS? Democratic lawmakers in GEORGIA got a rude awakening last week, but they should have anticipated it. The 2004 election put Republicans in charge of the House, and the transition to power has not been smooth, reports *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Seems those nasty Republicans have thrown Dems from their Capitol offices, kicked them off committees and — horrors! — changed the rules to benefit themselves. It is the first time since Reconstruction that Republicans have ruled the Capitol roost, and Democrats are plenty aghast. Republican response? Much the same as the Democratic mantra chanted over the past 130-plus years: “Hey, we’re in charge here.”

— *By A.G. BLOCK*



Editor: Rich Ehisen — capj@statenet.com

Associate Editor: Korey Clark — capj@statenet.com

Contributing Editor: A.G. Block — capj@statenet.com

Editorial Advisor: Lou Cannon

Correspondents: Richard Cox (CA), Steve Karas (CA),
Bruce McKeeman (CA), Kelli Walter (FL), Linda Mendenhall (IL),
Lauren King (MA) and Ben Livingood (PA)

Graphic Design: Richard Hansen, Heather Conway

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