

June 30, 2008

# Big Changes Coming?



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● The next issue of  
 ● Capitol Journal will be  
 ● available on July 7th.  
 ●

## Top Story

*All signs point to Democrats making huge gains in Congress this fall, and perhaps even winning back the White House. But would such a landslide produce a Democratic avalanche in state elections?*

## SNCJ Spotlight

### The Landslide Potential

Politics, as practiced in modern democracies, is in ill repute. Voters decry politics as riddled with hypocrisy and hyperbolic partisanship; many have low opinions of their leaders. This year, however, the U.S. presidential election has provided an antidote to the prevailing cynicism. Sen. Barack Obama and his “politics of hope” have elicited worldwide enthusiasm, while the resilient and under-funded

## A Cannon Perspective



With Lou Cannon

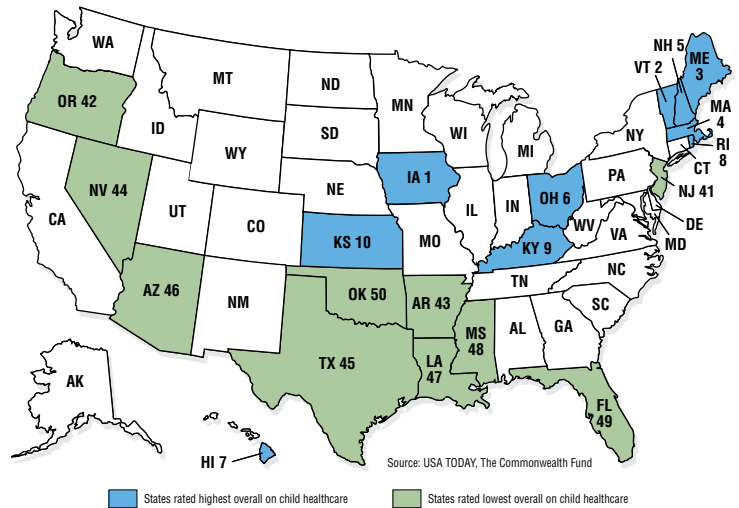
Sen. John McCain has contributed to the upbeat mood by securing his party's nomination in competition with a multi-millionaire. In the wake of these achievements, *The Economist*, the British weekly magazine, featured a cover with pictures of McCain and Obama under a headline that proclaimed: "America At Its Best." The lead editorial said the two soon-to-be presidential nominees provide "the most impressive choice America has had for a very long time."

Choices also abound in the congressional races, in which Democrats hope to extend the control they obtained in 2006. State elections are all but invisible in comparison but could shape the structure of American politics for the next decade. Six hundred and forty-two of the state senators elected this year will participate in the 2011 redistricting of all seats in the legislative houses and the federal House. In KANSAS the entire legislature will be chosen for a four-year term, as was the LOUISIANA legislature in 2007.

Small omens often foreshadow major political changes. So it was in May 1994 when the death of a longtime Democratic member of the U.S. House and the resignation of another prompted special elections in KENTUCKY and OKLAHOMA. Defying expectations, Republicans won both seats. These victories proved harbingers of the November elections when Republicans, under the leadership of Newt Gingrich and his "Contract With America" gained 52 seats and captured control of the House for the first time in 40 years.

Now, at a time when an overwhelming percentage of Americans believe their country is headed in the wrong direction, all portents point to the Democrats, who have won special elections this year in solidly Republican congressional districts in ILLINOIS, LOUISIANA, and MISSISSIPPI. In the wake of these defeats, Rep.

## Bird's eye view



### Children's access to healthcare variable across states



This past April, the Every Child Matters Education Fund reported that children's health varies widely from state to state (see Bird's eye view in May 5 issue of SNCJ). A study released last month looked at one possible reason for that. According to the private foundation The Commonwealth Fund, children's access to healthcare also varies significantly among states. The study found, for instance, that the percentage of children who received five vaccinations recommended for those between 19 months and 35 months of age ranged from 94 percent in MASSACHUSETTS to 67 percent in NEVADA, and the percentage of uninsured children ranged from 5 percent in MICHIGAN to 20 percent in TEXAS. The accompanying chart shows the 10 states rated highest and lowest overall, according to 13 measures the researchers considered, which included access, quality and cost.





dozen states have divided control. (NEBRASKA is non-partisan.) A Democratic voting surge that spills over into the legislative elections could end this divided control in TENNESSEE, where the State Senate is tied and in NEVADA, where Republicans hold a one-seat Senate advantage. In both states Democrats hold an edge in the House that they are likely to retain.

In Storey’s calculations, a strong Democratic turnout could impact legislative contests in at least four other states that are likely to be closely contested for the

presidency. Democrats are playing defense in COLORADO and NORTH CAROLINA, where they control both houses and are seeking to add to their margins. In MICHIGAN, Democrats control the House

**“Legislative races are an afterthought for many voters. A strong get-out-the-vote effort that targets party-line voters can pay huge dividends.”**

and are four seats shy of control in the State Senate. In OHIO, where Republicans have a lock on the Senate, a strong Obama showing could propel Democrats to victory in the House, now GOP by a seven-vote margin.

Gerrymandering has rendered 12 states virtually immune from changes in legislative composition no matter what happens at the top of the ticket. CALIFORNIA, for instance, is so rigidly redistricted that only four of 495 congressional and legislative seats have changed partisan hands in the last three election cycles. This is not the stuff of which landslides are made.

Even so, this year’s hard-fought contests in the presidential primaries have reinvigorated a political process that was crying out for change. Whatever happens in November, Obama has already brought hundreds of thousands of new voters into politics. McCain, too, has upset the apple cart. He was given up as politically dead shortly before he became the presumptive Republican nominee.

To be sure, the optimism these candidates have engendered may wither in the summer heat. The economist Robert Samuelson, casting a vote for an imagined “McBama,” contends that Obama’s advocacy of economic growth and energy independence is undermined by opposition to trade agreements and domestic oil drilling. Samuelson faults McCain for mistaking “stubbornness for principle” on campaign finance reform and other issues. Some of this skepticism crept into the otherwise salutatory editorial in *The Economist*: McCain is a “doughty but cranky old warrior” and Obama an “inspirational but sometimes vaporous young visionary.”

So even if Obama and McCain are the best America has to offer, their reputations may not survive the usual bruising campaign. But there is at least a chance for change. If the stars are in alignment for Obama, his election could put Democrats solidly in control of the legislative branch in Congress and in a solid majority of the states.

— *By Lou Cannon*

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# Budget & taxes

**M**ORE STATES HIKING GAS TAXES THAN SUSPENDING THEM: Soaring gas prices have some public officials calling for suspending gas taxes. But no state has done so yet this year. And a few states have actually raised their gas tax.

NEBRASKA, for instance, passed a 3-cents-per-gallon increase that will take effect July 1, raising its rate to 26.9 cents, the 20th highest in the nation. IOWA is also raising its gas tax on July 1, from 20.7 cents per gallon to 21 cents per gallon, although that increase is an automatic adjustment intended to encourage the use of ethanol. MINNESOTA, meanwhile, in the aftermath of the interstate bridge collapse that killed 13 people last August, enacted a phased-in 8.5-cent gas tax increase over Gov. Tim Pawlenty's (R) veto. INDIANA, KENTUCKY, GEORGIA, MAINE and WASHINGTON have also opted to raise their gas tax this year, according to Teresa Dondlinger Trissell, senior tax counsel for the American Petroleum Institute.

The main reason there's been more gas tax hikes than freezes is simple:

"State legislators recognize [suspending their gas tax would] do more harm than good," said Nicholas Farber, an analyst for the National Conference of State Legislatures. "By reducing the amount of money coming into the state, they're reducing the amount of money available to repair roads and reducing the number of jobs for people who repair roads."

As fuel prices have gone up, fuel consumption has gone down and the revenue states use for highway maintenance, which is generally tied to the number of gallons sold, has gone down along with it. But the public's lack of awareness about that economic reality puts states in a bind.

"The biggest misconception we come across in COLORADO is that people think that because gas prices go up, our revenue goes up," said Heather Copp, CFO for COLORADO's Department of Transportation.

And that may explain why more states aren't jumping on the gas-tax-hike bandwagon. WYOMING, which has the second-lowest gas tax in the nation, at 14 cents per gallon, "is very resistant to increasing gas taxes," said Sharon Gostovich, a spokeswoman for that state's Department of Transportation.

"A proposal to raise the tax 10 cents over three years, considered earlier this year, not only failed, but it failed seriously."

The last time KANSAS increased its fuel tax was during a budget crunch in 2002, said Transportation Department spokesman Steve Swartz.

"We're starting to get more concerned all the time," he said. "But it's a politically difficult time to raise the gas tax." (OMAHA WORLD-HERALD)



## RECOVERY FROM MIDWEST FLOODS

**WILL TAKE MONEY AND TIME:** More than \$2.5 billion in disaster relief for what some are calling the Katrina of the Midwest has been approved by the U.S. House and is on track to be signed into law. But some predict the federal bill for the devastating floods in America's heartland will top the \$5.7 billion that was run up by the record floods of 1993. And recovery will require more than just money. "It's going to take a long time," said Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IOWA). Rep. Tom Latham's (R-IOWA) remarks on the House floor spelled out why that was likely to be the case: "Every sector of Iowa's economy has been touched, and the range of damage is endless." (DES MOINES REGISTER)

**BUDGETS IN BRIEF: VIRGINIA's** Democrat-controlled Senate passed a gas-tax hike in special session last week, but the proposal faces near-certain death in the Republican-controlled House of Delegates (ROANOKE TIMES). • A massive housing bill moving through Congress contains a provision that for the first time would grant homeowners a standard federal tax deduction for their state and local

**"Every sector of Iowa's economy has been touched, and the range of damage is endless."**

property taxes. The benefit — \$500 for individuals and \$1,000 for couples — would only go to homeowners who don't itemize their deductions

and would not be available to taxpayers in states that raise their property tax rates before the end of 2008 (DES MOINES REGISTER). • As part of his "1,000 Health Kids and Families" campaign, **ILLINOIS** Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) is offering the first 1,000 families that enroll a child in the state's All Kids insurance program a \$50 gas card (CHICAGO SUN-TIMES). • **NEW JERSEY** lawmakers approved \$600 million in cuts to the state budget last week. The new \$32.9 billion spending plan slashes funding for property-tax relief, colleges, hospitals and municipalities (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER). • **WEST VIRGINIA** Gov. Joe Manchin (D) announced last week that a freeze on a 5 to 7 cents-per-gallon increase in the gas tax scheduled for Jan. 1 would be on the agenda of the special session that began June 23 (CHARLESTON GAZETTE). • **KENTUCKY** lawmakers passed a pension reform bill in special session last week. The measure (HB 1) — which was the only item on the session's agenda — reduces benefits for future hires and establishes a timeline for increasing state funding of the public retirement systems, which are underfunded by nearly \$27 billion (COURIER-JOURNAL [LOUISVILLE]). • The U.S. Treasury Department has confiscated about \$2 billion in economic stimulus rebate checks to cover unpaid bills for child support, student loans and back taxes (USA TODAY).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

## Upcoming elections

06/26/2008 - 07/17/2008

07/15/2008

### Alabama Primary Runoff

US House (All)

US Senate (Jeff Sessions)

### Georgia Primary Election

House (All)

Senate (All)

US House (All)

US Senate (Chambliss)

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# Politics & leadership

**N**Y SENATE LEADER BRUNO STEPS DOWN: NEW YORK's highest ranking Republican, Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno, shocked fellow lawmakers and Capitol watchers last week with the news that he would not seek re-election in the fall.

"I didn't see it coming," said Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D), who, together with Bruno, has largely dictated the course of legislative activity in the state

**"The senator certainly is a piece of Albany. An era ends with Joe Bruno."**

for years. "The senator certainly is a piece of Albany. An era ends with Joe Bruno."

Even at age 79 and after more than three decades in office, Bruno, a former Army boxing champion, seemed to have plenty of fight left in him. He spent much of last year sparring with former Gov. Eliot Spitzer (D), until the governor's resignation three months ago in connection with a sex scandal.

But Bruno has evidently been worn down by a two-year federal investigation into his personal business dealings, increasing stress over the prospect of his party losing its one-seat majority in the Senate in November, and the death of his wife of 57 years in January.

"After 32 years in office, I have decided that it is time to move on with my life and to give my constituents an opportunity for new representation and my colleagues in the Senate who have supported me an opportunity for new leadership," Bruno said in a statement. He went on to say: "Politics is a tough ballgame. Tougher now than it has ever been."

Some said Bruno's departure would only make things tougher for Senate Republicans, particularly given that Bruno had persuaded several other older members to stand for re-election in recent years and that some of them might now follow his lead into retirement.

"His resignation, I think, will have an effect on their ability to hold on to their majority," said Assemblyman Michael Benjamin (D). "He was the center. And when the center falls, everything falls apart."

But the following day, Republicans, seeking a speedy transition, selected Bruno's successor: Deputy Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos. And Sen. Caesar Trunzo, the oldest member of the Senate, at 82, said he planned to run again and that he believed his colleagues would do the same.

"I don't think anybody wants to retire," he said.

If Trunzo is right about that, and if the Republicans manage to hold on to the Senate, things could still be quite a bit different in Albany next year. Assembly Speaker Silver is not considered to have the most yielding political style. But Bruno is more of an old-school politician, able to diffuse confrontation with humor, and the two managed to develop a good working relationship.



“Shelly and Bruno, they learned how to dance over the years. They learned how to do the two-step,” said Assemblyman Jeffrion L. Aubry (D).

Skelos, however, is apparently more like Silver, suggesting they’re less likely to become dance partners.

“The personal relationship between Skelos and Shelly is going to be more edgy, that’s for sure,” Aubry said. (NEW YORK TIMES)

**“Shelly and Bruno, they learned how to dance over the years. They learned how to do the two-step. The personal relationship between Skelos and Shelly is going to be more edgy, that’s for sure.”**

**PAY RAISE RAISES FUROR IN LA:** Before adjourning their session on June 23, LOUISIANA’s part-time lawmakers passed a pay raise for themselves, more than doubling their salary from \$16,800 to \$37,500. They hadn’t received a base pay increase since 1980, and they contended that with the governor calling them into special session so often, their job really wasn’t part-time.

But those arguments did little to appease the public. Talk-radio show hosts, bloggers and newspaper editorials railed against the pay hike. Legislators were inundated with

**“It has become obvious to me that we – the Legislature – grossly misjudged the issue of legislative pay during the past session.”**

angry emails, and recall efforts were launched against several of them. In the face of the public outcry, numerous lawmakers submitted pledges that they would not accept the

raise, and at least two urged Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) to veto the bill.

“It has become obvious to me that we — the Legislature — grossly misjudged the issue of legislative pay during the past session. As a result, I am recommending that you veto SB 672 so that we can come together with our constituents to determine a more reasonable compensation plan for legislators,” Rep. John LaBruzzo (R) wrote in a letter to the governor.

Rep. Frank Hoffmann (R), likewise, said of the raise, “The timing was bad, the amount was too much.” He said he’d also spoken to Gov. Jindal and recommended that he veto the bill, adding that he thought there was “movement to veto it” among lawmakers.

But the governor has shown little inclination to do so, fearing it would jeopardize legislation he might propose in the future. Instead he’s tried to frame the issue as an internal legislative matter.

“I will keep my pledge to let them govern themselves,” the governor said in a statement after the Legislature passed the increase.

That position has opened Jindal up to critics who charge that during his election campaign he pledged to “prohibit legislators from giving themselves pay raises.” Some say his handling of the episode may threaten his political future, including an immediate shot at national office; before the current crisis, he was considered a top potential running mate for Sen. John McCain.

“This pay raise is devastating him,” said conservative talk-radio host Moon Griffon. “I’ve gotten over 5,000 e-mails from people who say they voted for him, and who say they would never vote for him again.” He added, “People don’t like hypocrisy, and they like somebody with guts.”

**“People don’t like hypocrisy, and they like somebody with guts.”**

If Jindal wants to find his way back into the good graces of those listeners by vetoing the pay hike, he’ll have to act by July 8. (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS], NEW YORK TIMES)

**MI VOTERS MAY CONSIDER MAJOR POLITICAL REFORMS:**

MICHIGAN voters may have an opportunity in November to institute sweeping constitutional reforms. An obscure group called Reform MICHIGAN Government Now! is collecting signatures for a ballot measure that would among other things cut lawmakers pay by 25 percent, reduce the number of state senators from 38 to 28 and the number of representatives from 110 to 82, and eliminate two seats on the Supreme Court and seven seats on the Court of Appeals.

“I think government is broken,” said Diane Byrum, a consultant representing the ballot committee. “It’s not the fault of any one individual, but this will make elected officials more responsive to the people who put them in office.”

Byrum wouldn’t say who was backing the measure, but there were some indications of who generally might be involved. Byrum is a former Democratic lawmaker. And eight of the nine judges who would lose their seats under the proposal are Republicans (although they were elected in nonpartisan elections).

Some Democratic Party insiders said party Chairman Mark Brewer oversaw the drafting of the measure, but Brewer, like Byrum, declined to comment on that subject. Republican Party Chairman Saul Anuzis said regardless of who actually authored the amendment, its provisions read like a “Mark Brewer wish list” for a complete Democratic takeover of state government.

Vice president of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce Robert LaBrant called the proposal, which is almost two-thirds as long as the entire current state constitution, an “outrageous abuse” of the amendment process.

“This isn’t an amendment; this is a general revision of the MICHIGAN Constitution,” he said. “This proposal covers the waterfront.”

Rich Robinson, director of the MICHIGAN Campaign Finance Network, however, liked many of the amendment’s provisions, such as financial disclosure



requirements for elected officials and a two-year cooling off period for lawmakers who become lobbyists. But he said there was one key thing missing from the proposal: a rule prohibiting ballot campaigns from operating without transparency in the months prior to an election.

“It’s an absolutely ridiculous system that results in us not knowing anything about who is behind this until a month after they get on the ballot,” Robinson said.

Despite that glaring omission, or perhaps because of it, the measure appears to have a reasonably good chance of making it onto the November ballot. The campaign has until July 7 to submit 380,000-plus registered voters’ signatures. And the Democratic insiders said the campaign will likely turn in at least 500,000 signatures by then. (DETROIT FREE PRESS)

**POLITICS IN BRIEF:** On July 14, the NEVADA Supreme Court will take up the issue of whether the state’s 12-year term limit for state and local officials is constitutional. The court had actually been asked to rule on a more limited issue: whether the term limit went into effect in 1996 or with the 1998 election (LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL.)

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

## In the hopper

At any given time, State Net tracks tens of thousands of bills in all 50 states, the US Congress and the District of Columbia. Here’s a snapshot of what’s in the legislative works:

**Number of prefiles last week:** 255

**Number of Intros last week:** 1,138

**Number of bills enacted/adopted last week:** 772

**Number of prefiles to date:** 20,759

**Number of Intros to date:** 85,814

**Number of bills enacted/adopted overall to date:** 22,906

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(measures current as of 06/26/2008)  
Source: State Net database

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# Governors

**C**RIST BACKS OFFSHORE OIL DRILLING: When running for office in 2006, then-FLORIDA gubernatorial candidate Charlie Crist said he would never support oil drilling off the Sunshine State coast. But Crist reversed himself last week, calling for an end to the 26-year-old ban and saying the matter should be up to individual states to decide for themselves. That reversal brought howls of protest from both environmentalists and Democrats, who accused Crist of changing his position in an effort to bolster his chances of being presumptive Republican presidential candidate John McCain’s vice presidential running mate. McCain has called for an end to prohibitions on oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.





There is no question that Huntsman loves the idea. “I think we’re onto something that long term is good for the state,” he said in announcing the plan last Thursday. State Administrative Services Director Kim Hood said the plan will allow the state to close about 1,000 buildings for an extra day a week, saving about 20 percent of the current energy costs for those buildings. That, she said, could translate to millions of dollars in savings. (SALT LAKE TRIBUNE)

## Upcoming stories

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

- **Nuclear power**
- **Prison health care**
- **No Child Left Behind**

**LESSON LEARNED?** Saying he has “learned his lesson,” LOUISIANA Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) said he will approve the pay raise that Pelican State lawmakers voted for themselves this session in hopes they will pass the ethics reform measures he promised in his campaign. Jindal said he “would probably be the most popular governor in modern polling history” if he vetoed the measure, which hikes legislators’ base salary from \$16,800 to \$37,500, effective this week. Although Jindal characterized the pay hike as “excessive” and “over the top,” he said he doesn’t want to give lawmakers any excuse “to slow down the reforms we’ve started. I don’t want to give them any excuse to throw sand in the gears.” Jindal vowed “tighter reigns on the Legislature” next year, saying he would be more involved with lawmakers “at the committee level” and make strident use of veto threats. (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS], ADVOCATE [BATON ROUGE])

**GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: OHIO** Gov. Ted Strickland (D) lifted a salary freeze on his highest-earning staff last week after supervisors complained that their salaries were no longer far enough above the people they managed and began to leave the state payroll for outside jobs. The governor enacted the freeze last year in response to the Buckeye State’s budget woes (CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER).

• **CONNECTICUT** Gov. M. Jodi Rell (R) signed legislation that will allow a judge to revoke or reduce the pension of state and municipal employees who are convicted of crimes while in office. Rell called it the toughest ethics law in the nation (HARTFORD COURANT).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

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## Hot issues

**B**USINESS: The U.S. Supreme Court overturns a CALIFORNIA Law that barred companies from using funds from the state to campaign against union organizing drives. The court ruled that employers have the right to speak



discipline code as more traditional means of bullying, such as physical or verbal harassment. The bills go to Gov. Don Carcieri (R) for review (BOSTON GLOBE).

**ENVIRONMENT:** The **MASSACHUSETTS** Senate endorses a bill that would require Bay State energy companies to look to cost-effective renewable sources of energy before relying on more traditional sources. The proposal would also require state government to buy more fuel-efficient vehicles and allow homeowners or tenants to pay for renewable energy products on their monthly utility bill. The measure moves to the House (BOSTON GLOBE). • The U.S. Supreme Court strikes down a \$2.5 billion punitive damages judgment against oil conglomerate Exxon for its role in the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in **ALASKA**. The court reduced the award — the largest of its kind in U.S. history — to \$507.5 million, the same as the compensatory damages (CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR). • **WISCONSIN** officials approve new regulations that could require Badger State utilities to cut mercury emissions by 90 percent by as early as 2015. That could change, however, if utilities make cuts in the other pollutants, such as nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide. If those cuts are made, the mercury reduction deadlines will be pushed back to 70 percent by 2015, 80 percent by 2018 and 90 percent by 2021 (MILWAUKEE JOURNAL-SENTINEL). • The **MICHIGAN** Senate approves the Wolverine State's participation in the Great Lakes Compact, which restricts water diversions out of the lakes without state approval. The package of 12 bills moves to Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D), who has said she will sign them into law. **PENNSYLVANIA** is the lone Great Lakes state yet to ratify the Compact (DETROIT NEWS).

**HEALTH & SCIENCE:** In **SOUTH CAROLINA**, Gov. Mark Sanford (R) vetoes HB 3912, legislation that requires health insurers to pay doctors' claims within 40 business days for a paper claim and 20 days for an electronic claim. Sanford said he vetoed the bill because it also allowed insurers to deny or question payment in cases where a doctor's decision falls outside nationally accepted practice standards (GREENVILLE NEWS).

**IMMIGRATION:** The **RHODE ISLAND** Senate rejects legislation that would have required private employers to check use a federal database to check the immigration status of new hires. Lawmakers said they feared the measure was unconstitutional (PROVIDENCE JOURNAL). • The U.S. Supreme Court rejects a challenge from environmental groups to the federal Dept. of Homeland Security's waiver of more than 30 state and federal environmental laws to speed construction of a 670-mile border security fence along the U.S.-Mexico border. Several other suits are still pending, including one by a coalition of **TEXAS** lawmakers and businesses that claims the DHS has not acted in good faith in dealing with border landowners (DALLAS MORNING NEWS).



**SOCIAL POLICY:** The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the District of Columbia’s handgun restrictions, the nation’s most stringent, are unconstitutional. The justices said the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution contains a specific right to individual gun ownership. The ruling does not bar governments from regulating handguns, only from banning them entirely (WALL STREET JOURNAL). • **MICHIGAN** Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) vetoes legislation that would have barred late-term or so-called partial-birth abortions. Granholm said she vetoed the measure because it did not provide exceptions to preserve the mother’s health and life (DETROIT FREE PRESS).

**POTPOURRI:** The **LOUISIANA** House endorses SB 159, which bars drivers 17 and younger from talking on cell phones or text messaging while driving. It moves to Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) for review (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS]). • **MICHIGAN** Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) vetoes HB 4749, legislation that would have allowed Wolverine State motorcycle riders go helmetless. It is the second straight year that Granholm has nixed such a proposal (DETROIT FREE PRESS). • The **PENNSYLVANIA** House gives initial approval to legislation that would bar Keystone State pension funds from investing in foreign companies doing business in Iran and Sudan. It faces a final vote in that chamber before it moves to the Senate (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER).

— Compiled by RICH EHISEN

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## Once around the statehouse lightly

**PARTY POOPER I:** In politics, sticking it to a person who has crossed you is as time-honored a tradition as sine die. Usually, however, the sticker and stickee are not from the same party. But as the *Sacramento Bee* reports, that is exactly what happened when a package of high-profile, Democrat-sponsored Assembly bills dealing with the subprime mortgage mess recently came before the Senate Banking committee, chaired by Democratic Sen. Mike Machado. Assembly Dems naturally presumed the bills were a slam dunk. Instead, at Machado’s urging, the committee either killed or gutted each measure. Machado’s rationale? He thought it better to defer to federal regulators on the matter. That is, he did until his own package of mortgage reform bills came before the Assembly Banking and Finance committee a few days later. Faster than a speeding foreclosure, the committee — again dominated by Democrats — rebuffed them all. When asked if he thought it was retaliation, Machado huffed, “I am not going to lower myself to the pettiness of that.”



**PARTY POOPER II: SOUTH DAKOTA**

Gov. Mike Rounds doesn't shy away from poking lawmakers in the eye once in a while, even his fellow Republicans. As the *Sioux Falls Argus Leader* reports, Rounds was on the radio circuit last week to discuss a legislative dustup over a proposed change in how the state calculates taxes on ethanol/gasoline mixes. In doing so, he accused lawmakers of acting "out of plain ignorance." He further suggested that they need "to learn how to read legislation." That drew a heated response from GOP lawmakers like Republican Sen. Jerry Apa, who said Rounds' comments don't help to "bridge the communication gap between the legislative and executive branches." Rounds not only didn't offer an apology, he reiterated that he thought lawmakers were being "ignorant." He did offer, however, that he could have found "a better way to say it."

**PARTY HEARTY:** It took months of haggling, but LOUISIANA has finally named an official cocktail of New Orleans. As the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* reports, lawmakers have been grappling for months over Senate Bill 6, which originally proposed to make the Sazerac — a combination of whiskey, bitters and occasionally even Cognac created in New Orleans more than 160 years ago — the official state cocktail. But pols rejected that idea. Bloodied but unbowed, bill author Sen. Edwin Murray changed the bill to address only New Orleans. That crashed as well, seemingly making it a dead issue. But a last ditch effort by Murray and others revived the bill once again, and this time it passed and is on its way to the governor, who is expected to sign it. With victory at hand, you can bet more than a few Sazeracs will be consumed on Bourbon Street this week.

**PARTY OVER?** Fourteen years ago, world-renowned marine muralist Wyland — just one name — gave his okay for CALIFORNIA officials to use one of his iconic images of a whale's tail for one of the state's many specialty license plates. But that "handshake deal" may be kaput. As the *Los Angeles Times* reports, Wyland recently told the state Coastal Commission that he now wants 20 percent of the state's annual \$3.7 million in profits from the plates to fund his nonprofit ocean conservation foundation. The state called the demand "outrageous" and said no dice, so Wyland says he is reclaiming the image. Fine, says Assemblyman Jared Huffman, who has introduced a bill to authorize hiring an artist to create a new whale-tail image. Yeah right, said Wyland, who says the state so can't ever replace his work, you know. Huffman calls Wyland's perspective "self-aggrandizing."

**In case you missed it**

More than 100,000 same-sex couples are expected to apply for marriage licenses when a new CALIFORNIA law goes into effect this week. As we noted in the June 16 issue of SNCJ, that could mean big bucks to for the Golden State economy.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at

[http://www.statenet.com/capitol\\_journal/06-16-2008/html](http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/06-16-2008/html)

— By RICH EHISEN



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