

# A Question of Honor



July 9, 2007

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● The next issue of Capitol Journal will be available on July 9th.

## Top Story

*Governors often order flags flown at half-mast to honor soldiers killed in combat. But federal officials often refuse, claiming they are not under state jurisdiction. But a new federal law tips control of the flag directly to the states.*

## SNCJ Spotlight

### Govs rule flag battle

Given the tense nature of their relationship these days, it is hard to imagine the federal government willingly giving states authority over them in any situation. But that is just what President George W. Bush did recently when he signed legislation that says all federal buildings in a state must comply when the governor orders the American flag lowered to half-staff in honor of soldiers killed in battle.



Bush signed the measure in response to complaints from families of fallen soldiers who claimed the flag was often not lowered at federal buildings despite the governors' instructions to do so. Federal officials defended their unwillingness to comply with those orders because they did not consider themselves under governors' jurisdiction.

But while the new law pleases military families, it could potentially place the Bush administration in the somewhat uncomfortable position of having Democrats like Washington D.C. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty, MARYLAND Gov. Martin O'Malley and VIRGINIA Gov. Tim Kaine order flags lowered at several major federal government sites.

For instance, Fenty, who was granted the same flag-lowering authority as a governor, could conceivably order flags to be lowered at the White House or Congress. The National Security Agency, which is at the heart of a highly controversial domestic wiretapping program supported by the White House as a means to fight terrorism, is in MARYLAND, while the Pentagon, Arlington National Cemetery and other key sites are located in VIRGINIA.

Should that happen, some observers note, it could place greater emphasis on the more than 3,900 American soldiers killed so far in Iraq and Afghanistan. Others, such as flag protocol expert Joyce Doody, executive director of the National Flag Foundation, also fear that frequent flag lowerings could

**“It’s not the state or the federal government we’re honoring here. It’s the person who died.”**

“trivialize” the symbol. In an interview with ABC News, Doody said, “We want to make sure that half-staffing remains a significant, unique gesture of national mourning.”

Although many governors have regularly ordered the U.S. flag lowered since the war began four years ago, to date, neither Kaine nor O'Malley has been among them. Both governors have so far stuck to ordering only state flags lowered to honor soldiers killed in combat. Kaine has been particularly limited in his orders, confining them only to the region from which the fallen soldier hailed. According to a spokeswoman, Mayor Fenty has not yet determined his flag policy or decided whether to include federal buildings in any flag-lowering order.

Although not likely, it is possible that some federal officials could still ignore a gubernatorial flag order. The new law has no penalties for noncompliance, leaving it open

## The week in session

**States in Regular Session:** CA, DC, IL, MA, NC, PA, WI

**States in Skeleton Session:** OH

**States in Special Session:** IL “a”, IL “b”, KY “a”

**States in Recess:** MI, NH, NJ, NY, US

**States Currently Prefiling or Drafting for 2008:** FL, KY

**States Projected to Adjourn:** DE, NH

**States in Special Session Projected to Adjourn:** CT “a”

**States Adjourned in 2007:** AK, AL, AR, AZ, CO, CT, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, ME, MN, MS, MT, ND, NE, NM, NV, OK, OR, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, VT, WA, WV, WY

**State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2007:** AK “a”, AL “a”, FL “a”, FL “b”, MS “a”, MT “a”, NM “a”, WI “a”, WV “a”

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(session information current as of 07/06/2007)  
Source: State Net database

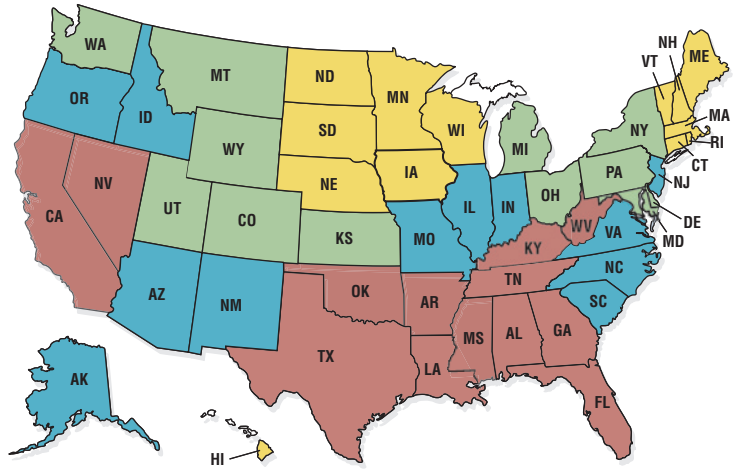


for an official who disagrees with the order to simply refuse to go along. “The president is the ultimate authority when it comes to deciding whether to follow the Flag Code or not,” said Doody. “But it would be highly unusual for an administration not to follow it.”

MICHIGAN Rep. Bart Stupak (D), who sponsored the federal bill, says he hopes the issue will not become yet another politics-infested imbroglio that overshadows the reason behind his legislation, which he says was inspired by federal buildings in his state not adhering to orders from Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) to fly American flags at half-staff when soldiers are killed. “It’s not the state or the federal government we’re honoring here. It’s the person who died,” Stupak said. “I hope they would look at it with respect to the families.” (ABC NEWS, NEW YORK TIMES, STATELINE.ORG, ST. PETERSBURG TIMES)

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

## Bird’s eye view



Source: Commonwealth Fund

Top Quartile Second Quartile Third Quartile Fourth Quartile

### Health care not equal in all states



When it comes to quality health care, all states are not created equal. So says a new report sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund, a private foundation that advocates for health care policy reform. According to their study — which ranks states on 32 indicators of access, quality, avoidable hospital use and costs, equity, and “healthy lives” — HAWAII provides the best overall care, followed by IOWA and NEW HAMPSHIRE. Conversely, OKLAHOMA is at the bottom of the rankings, just barely ahead of MISSISSIPPI and TEXAS. But the study is also quick to note that even high ranking states have much room for improvement. For instance, when it comes to adults age 50 or older receiving all recommended preventive care, MINNESOTA was the top performer at just 50 percent, while the percent of diabetics receiving just basic preventive care services topped out at 65 percent in HAWAII.

# Budget & taxes

**FIREWORKS FLY OVER IL BUDGET:** The conflict between ILLINOIS Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) and leaders of the General Assembly — House Speaker Michael Madigan (D), in particular — which forced the state to begin the new fiscal year this month without a new budget, reached new heights last week.

The fireworks began when Blagojevich called lawmakers into special session July 5, after agreeing to let them have until July 10 off, as part of an agreement to extend the 2007 budget into July. Madigan responded by scheduling a “Committee of the



Whole” — a gathering of the full House, usually reserved for questioning witnesses about an issue — the same day to consider a key provision of Blagojevich’s budget plan, a proposal to restructure the state’s pension debt using proceeds from the lease of the state lottery to private investors.

In a letter announcing the meeting, Madigan invited the governor to attend, using a less-than-cordial tone. “It is our request that you stay for the duration of the hearing and...be fully prepared to answer detailed questions,” the letter stated.

Blagojevich declined the invitation, indicating that he would make his staff available instead. Which may have been a wise move, given that Madigan engineered a similar impromptu vote earlier this year on another of the governor’s proposals, a restructuring of the business tax, which went down to a 107-0 defeat. (CHICAGO TRIBUNE, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH)

**MAINE SEEKS TO RETAIN COLLEGE GRADS:** Over half of those who earn degrees each year at MAINE colleges head off to other states to live, work and pay taxes after graduating. Last month, Pine Tree State lawmakers took action to try to stem that receding tide, passing first-in-the-nation legislation providing tax credits to help graduates who stay in the state cover the cost of their college loan payments. The measure actually began as a citizen’s initiative, but when the proposal received enough signatures to qualify for the November ballot, lawmakers opted to handle the matter legislatively. The bill received overwhelming support in both chambers. But there were some holdouts, such as Sen. Richard Nass (R), who said, “As I look at the state’s financial situation, here we are now obligating ourselves to college students at a time when the poorest of the poor are getting kicked off Medicaid,” adding, “I don’t share some folks’ concern for college students. Many of them are talented and fortunate. They are acquiring for their own benefit.... They will be able to easily pay off their loans. I don’t think we need to provide them with money from our treasury.” But Sen. Ethan Strimling (D) countered that the program was a good investment. “MAINE is losing a lot of young people, and this is a great opportunity to build long-term economic sustainability and keep young minds here,” he said. “It hurts our economy in the long term when we lose so many young minds who could be vitalizing our community....” (BOSTON GLOBE)

**REFORM FAILS TO SPEED PA BUDGET PROCESS:** The PENNSYLVANIA General Assembly instituted reforms this year aimed at eliminating the backroom deals and partisan bickering that have plagued past sessions. The House imposed a 24-hour waiting period, and the Senate a more conservative 6-hour one, between the time that a bill is amended and when that bill can be voted upon. Those changes clearly netted some benefit. “I feel like I’ve gotten a chance to read bills,” said Sen. Lisa Boscola (D). The reforms, however, did little to speed along the state’s budget process. Last



week, for the fifth year in a row, the state missed its budget deadline and began sending out furlough notices to state workers, informing them not to show up for work this week unless a budget is approved.

“It’s aggravating as hell,” said Senate minority leader Robert J. Mellow (D). “It’s almost like a rite of passage to be here on the fourth Saturday in June.” Gov. Ed Rendell (D) predictably blamed the delay on the Senate’s Republican majority, saying they’ve had his agenda since March. Republicans just as predictably said

it was Rendell’s fault, for barraging them with constantly shifting priorities. And some say that no matter what reforms are instituted in Harrisburg, some things are never really going to change. “This is a test of wills over priorities, and, at heart, philosophies,” said G. Terry Madonna, a pollster and professor of political science at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Penn. (MORNING CALL, PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER)

**“It’s aggravating as hell. It’s almost like a rite of passage to be here on the fourth Saturday in June.”**

**BUDGETS IN BRIEF: CALIFORNIA’S** 3<sup>rd</sup> District Court of Appeal rejected the state’s plan to float \$525 million in bonds to help cover its public employee pension obligations. The court upheld a lower court’s ruling that those bonds are subject to a constitutional provision requiring the Legislature to obtain a two-thirds vote in each house and voter approval before borrowing more than \$300,000 (SACRAMENTO BEE). • **OHIO** Gov. Ted Strickland (D) signed off on a \$52 billion budget shortly before the end of the fiscal year (July 1) and after vetoing a taxpayer-funded voucher program that would have allowed special needs children to attend private schools (ASSOCIATED PRESS, TOLEDO BLADE)

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

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## Politics & leadership

**CALIFORNIA LAWMAKERS’ HEALTHY BENEFITS:** When it comes to being compensated for their work, CALIFORNIA legislators have it pretty good. On top of their \$113,098 annual salary — the highest in the nation — they receive a \$162-per-day tax-free allowance for travel and living expenses while the Legislature is in session. Which can add up. Assemblywoman Nell Soto (D) and Sen. Edward Vincent (D), for instance, earned over \$35,000 in “per diem” pay between them over a period of several months. What’s a little unusual about that is neither lawmaker attended a single session during that period. Vincent, a 73-year-old former NFL player, was home — hundreds of miles from the Capitol — recovering



from knee surgery, while Soto, who just turned 81, was out with pneumonia.

Legislative rules actually allow lawmakers to collect per diem pay during “excused absences” from the Capitol, including personal illnesses, and legislative leaders defended the practice. “It’s been tradition that legislators aren’t punished because they are sick,” said a spokesman for Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez (D). And Secretary of the Senate Greg Schmidt, who commented at the request of Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata’s (D) office, said, “Absence due to illness is a difficult problem because people still have to maintain a residence up here. They don’t stop renting that house or apartment if they are sick.”

But David Kline, a spokesman for the CALIFORNIA Taxpayers’ Association, questions the legitimacy of that view. “If you are unable to travel to Sacramento or do the job due to medical reasons, it would seem like you wouldn’t need the per diem,” he said. “It does not seem to fit the definition of what per diem is for.” (SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER)

The legitimacy of per-diem sick pay seems all the more questionable given that almost half of the full-time private-sector workers in the U.S. -- most of them in the bottom quarter of wage earners -- get no paid sick leave at all. And according to State Net’s database, while at least 10 states considered paid sick leave bills this year, most of those efforts have failed. (Bills are still pending in NEW YORK, OREGON, VERMONT and MAINE.) (SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER, NEW YORK TIMES, STATE NET)

**FLIGHT FIGHT IN ALBANY:** The ongoing battle between NEW YORK Gov. Eliot Spitzer (D) and Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno (R) took to the air last week, when *The Times Union* of Albany reported that both men had used state aircraft

**“He is not a dictator, he is not a tyrant, he is not a king.”**

to make trips that were at least partly political in nature and that Bruno had also used the State Police to escort him to GOP events.

The governor’s office called for a state review of the matter and submitted documents pertaining to the flights in question to the offices of the attorney general and the Albany County district attorney.

Bruno maintained that he did not make the trips exclusively to attend political events, but also to conduct official state business, which was allowed by state law. He also defended the police escorts by saying they’d been necessitated by death threats that had been made against him. “They told me, the authorities, not to open mail at

## Upcoming elections

07/05/2007 - 07/26/2007

07/10/2007

### **New Hampshire Special Election**

House Merrimack District No. 9 (Hooksett)

07/17/2007

### **Georgia Special Runoff**

US House (Congressional District 10)



my home at times, not to open packages,” he said, adding that a “deranged” man had once tried to get into his office to kill him. He went on to rail against the governor’s staff for being so quick to turn the matter into a legal issue, noting that the governor used police escorts for political events too.

And the majority leader didn’t stop there. He got personal, calling Spitzer “an overgrown rich spoiled brat who has tantrums all over the place,” who is “too temperamental to be the chief executive of 19 million people” and who “does not understand that he is not a dictator, he is not a tyrant, he is not a king,” throwing in the fact that Spitzer had done “practically nothing” to create jobs for good measure.

Bruno also made it clear that he was ready for the next round. “I grew up in the toughest part of Glens Fall, next to the boxcars, where kids would come up to you when you weighed 90 pounds and they weighed 120 and just punch you right in the mouth just because you were Italian, O.K., or just because you lived next to the boxcars, or just because they felt like it,” he said. “That’s how I grew up, O.K.?” he continued. “So swing away.” (NEW YORK TIMES, ALBANY TIMES UNION)

**SPECIAL SESSION TURBULENCE IN KY:** KENTUCKY House Democrats issued a harsh rebuke to Gov. Ernie Fletcher (R) last week, adjourning the chamber one day into a special session with an agenda so extensive, some said it could take up to eight weeks to get through it. Fletcher’s to-do list included, among many other things, providing tax incentives for alternative energy providers, imposing a ban on domestic partner benefits for public employees and granting income tax breaks for military personnel. But House Democrats said none of 67 total items were urgent enough to warrant a special session. They urged the Senate, which is controlled by Republicans, to follow suit. That request was rejected, although Democratic Floor Leader Ed Worley said most of his members would not take part. Fletcher blasted the Democrats over the decision, saying, “They took a cheap shot at me, yet they hit 4 million people.” (COURIER-JOURNAL [LOUISVILLE])

**POLITICS IN BRIEF:** Before concluding their 2007 session last month, OREGON lawmakers began making preparations for a test-drive of annual sessions next year, setting some deadlines for filing bills. The state decided last year to try out the idea of annual sessions before formally adopting them. The Beaver State is currently one of only six that meet every other year (STATESMAN JOURNAL [SALEM]).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

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# Governors

**H**OW GREEN IS SCHWARZENEGGER, REALLY? That's the question many Democrats and environmental groups were asking last week after CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) fired the head of the state Air Resources Board (ARB), the agency tasked with overseeing greenhouse gas reductions.

The move alarmed legislative leaders, who claimed that unrest at the agency could undermine the state's 2006 law requiring the state to reduce greenhouse gases 25 percent by 2020 in CALIFORNIA. Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez (D) immediately scheduled an oversight hearing to investigate the firing and examine the implications for the Golden state's efforts to combat global warming.

Schwarzenegger claimed the firing came because the ARB chairman, Robert Sawyer, was not being tough enough in enacting the state law. But both Sawyer and the agency's Executive Director, Catherine Witherspoon, contend it has been the governor's administration that has been slowing down the process, mostly notably in an effort to inhibit regulating the state's massive construction industry, one of the state's biggest polluters but also one of the governor's biggest campaign contributors. Witherspoon quit in protest soon after Sawyer's firing.

Critics immediately questioned whether Schwarzenegger, who has carefully crafted a world-wide reputation as an environmental crusader, was really committed to going green. But Schwarzenegger reacted quickly to blunt the criticism, hiring Mary Nichols, a former ARB chair and one of the state's first environmental lawyers, to oversee the agency. Nichols was also a high ranking environmental official in the Clinton administration.

But while tabbing Nichols seemed to calm some of the criticism, Democratic Legislative leaders warned that the issue is far from resolved. "You can have the best person at the helm of the board, but if the administration is trying to micromanage it on a day-to-day basis, it won't make a difference who is in charge over there," said Núñez. "It will lose credibility and become politicized."

Senate Pro Tem Don Perata has also expressed doubts about Schwarzenegger's enthusiasm for a "cap and trade" system that would allow companies that can't meet greenhouse gas limits to buy emissions permits from firms that have reduced their pollution to below allowed levels. He recently sent the governor a letter warning that Nichols may not get through her Senate confirmation if she similarly supports a cap and trade plan. (LOS ANGELES TIMES, SACRAMENTO BEE)

**EXECUTIVE ORDERS:** MAINE Gov. John Baldacci (D) issued an executive order that continues a state hiring freeze on all vacant positions. The order also requires that someone other than a department head agree that the position needs





that requires damages in civil lawsuits to be apportioned among defendants based on their level of responsibility for injuries or damages. The rejected measure would have instructed Granite State juries to assess no damages against a defendant in the suit unless they bear “substantial” fault in the case (UNION LEADER [CONCORD], STATE NET).

**CRIME & PUNISHMENT: MISSOURI** Gov. Matt Blunt (R) signs legislation that bars releasing the names of people who carry out executions in the Show Me State. The measure allows those workers to sue media outlets or others who reveal that information (ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH). • Still in **MISSOURI**, Gov. Blunt signs legislation that allows residents to use deadly force against people who intrude into their homes, vehicles or place of employment. The law also gives residents who use deadly force indemnity against prosecution or civil suits (ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH). • And once again in **MISSOURI**, Gov. Blunt signs HB 574, a measure that says hospital staff are not required to use a nonalcoholic swab for cleansing skin prior to drawing blood from a drunk-driving defendant. The measure also requires the courts to forward drug or alcohol-related dispositions to the state Highway Patrol (ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH). • **LOUISIANA** Gov. Kathleen Blanco (D) signs SB 221, legislation that bans gambling at cockfights. Blanco is also expected to soon pen her signature to HB 108, which would make the Pelican State the last in the nation to make cockfighting illegal (TIMES-PICAYUNE [NEW ORLEANS]).

**EDUCATION:** The Centers for Disease Control indefinitely suspends all of **TEXAS** A&M University’s federally approved research on the most dangerous infectious diseases after the school failed to report a pair of 2006 cases of human exposure to biological agents. Observers believe it is the first time the CDC has enacted such a ban on a university research facility (DALLAS MORNING NEWS).

**ENVIRONMENT:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to change a federal rule that requires states to show that wolves are the primary cause of wildlife herds not meeting state or tribal management goals before any of the predators can be killed. Under the new proposal, states and tribes would have to prove only that wolves were only one of the major causes of wildlife herds not meeting goals in order to justify asking the federal government for authority to kill the wolves. Federal

## 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: 65**

**Number of Intros last week: 325**

**Number of bills enacted/adopted last week: 883**

**Number of prefiles to date: 34,708**

**Number of Intros to date: 149,474**

**Number of enacted/adopted overall to date: 36,862**

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS  
(measures current as of 07/05/2007)  
Source: State Net database



wildlife officials plan to hold public hearings this month in **WYOMING, MONTANA** and **IDAHO** to discuss the proposal (CASPER STAR TRIBUNE).

**HEALTH & SCIENCE:** The **CALIFORNIA** Assembly Committee on Health approves SB 840, which would do away with private health care insurance in the Golden State and replace it with universal coverage administered by the government. The measure moves to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations (SACRAMENTO BEE). • **MISSOURI** Gov. Matt Blunt (R) signs SB 577, legislation that will provide healthcare coverage to around 13,000 Show Me State kids. The measure also extends coverage to almost 1,000 former foster kids between 18 and 21 (ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH). • The **NORTH CAROLINA** Senate endorses legislation that would require health care insurers to offer full coverage for nine of the most common mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and depression, but it would allow insurers to place restrictions on care for other mental illnesses, such as autism and attention-deficit disorder. The proposal returns to the House, which previously approved a different version of the bill (WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL).

**IMMIGRATION:** **ARIZONA** Gov. Janet Napolitano (D) signs HB 2779, legislation that could potentially strip Grand Canyon State employers of their business license for knowingly hiring illegal immigrants. Napolitano says she might call a special session this fall to deal with a provision she says could force the closure of hospitals, power plants and other critical facilities if they're cited for making illegal hires (ARIZONA REPUBLIC [PHOENIX]).

**SOCIAL POLICY:** **NEW HAMPSHIRE** Gov. John Lynch (D) signs legislation that repeals a Granite State law that required minor girls to get parental permission before they could have an abortion. The U.S. Supreme Court had found the law to be unconstitutional because it did not allow for exceptions in cases where the mother's life was in danger (CONCORD UNION LEADER).

**POTPOURRI:** **ARIZONA** Gov. Janet Napolitano (D) vetoes SB 1251, which would have expanded a recently adopted law that requires public buildings to provide adequate storage lockers for gun owners to place and store their weapons when on public property. Under the vetoed proposal, gun owners would have been allowed to carry their weapons onto the premises if those lockers were not available. Napolitano said she shot down the measure because the state was still working to implement the original law (ARIZONA REPUBLIC [PHOENIX]).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

## Upcoming stories

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

- **Payday loans**
- **Medical marijuana**
- **Animal rescues**

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# Once around the statehouse lightly

**BATTLE ROYALE:** It has clearly been a summer of discontent in statehouses across the nation. In June, ILLINOIS Gov. Rod Blagojevich almost came to blows with state Sen. Mike Jacobs — a fellow Democrat, for crying out loud — in a disagreement over the gov’s proposed health care plan. Then things went all schoolyard in the Heart of Dixie when ALABAMA Republican Sen. Charles Bishop punched Democratic Sen. Lowell Barron in the head for allegedly cursing at him. As if that wasn’t enough to make voters wonder which rock the last shreds of political civility had crawled under, the *New York Post* reports that NEW YORK Gov. Eliot Spitzer’s ongoing kafuffle with Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno got even nastier when Spitzer recently threatened to “knock out” Bruno. Bruno says he took the gov’s words to be a political threat, not a physical one because “He would know better than to try to knock me down.” Bruno, 78, is a former U.S. Army boxing champion.

**NOT SO GOLDEN BOYS:** It was not so long ago that CALIFORNIA Dems were simply all a thither over a pair of Golden State golden boys seemingly destined for political prime time. San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsome and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa were successful, well-spoken and, best of all, way handsome — perfect features for a run to replace Arnold Schwarzenegger in the governor’s office when he is termed out in 2010. But as the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports, both mayors have found themselves in self-created soap operas of late. Newsome went first, copping to having an affair with the wife of his top political consultant before checking himself into rehab for alcohol addiction. Not to be outdone, the married Villaraigosa last week admitted to having an affair with a popular news anchor at the Spanish-language media giant Telemundo. Pundits quickly surmised that both will probably survive, pointing to another former big city mayor with his own checkered romantic past — current GOP presidential frontrunner Rudy Giuliani.

**DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO:** As a top-level technology official with the IOWA Public Employees Retirement System, Thomas Rice was responsible for monitoring the Web sites his fellow workers would peruse on the job. His job was to help root out who might be using state-owned equipment for improper purposes. Apparently, however, Rice didn’t believe those rules applied to him. As reported by the *Des Moines Register*, he was fired last May for using his state computer to surf loads of Internet porn sites and adult dating services. Undaunted, Rice asked for unemployment compensation. The judge denied the claim, calling Rice’s actions an “egregious” abuse of public trust. At least she didn’t accuse him of self abuse.



**MICKEY D ON SPEED...DIAL:** The 911 calls just kept coming, as many as 20 each shift. No emergency and no identification, just some gibberish and then a dead line. Authorities knew the general area where they were coming from, but they couldn't pinpoint the exact location. So, using logic only a parent could truly appreciate, they decided to offer the caller something she wanted if she would just tell them where she was — something from McDonald's. Suitably incentivized, the voice on the other end of the line gave up the address and authorities swooped down. The caller? According to the Associated Press, it was a 4-year-old Chicago girl using her mom's deactivated cell phone. Although the phone was not otherwise usable, federal law says deactivated cell phones still must be able to access 911. Apparently federal law says nothing about keeping them away from toddlers.

— By *RICH EHISEN*

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