

Better Days Ahead?



September 8, 2008

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● The next issue of
 ● Capitol Journal will be
 ● available on September 15th.
 ●

Top Story

It has been a rough eight years for the relationship between states and the White House. State officials are hopeful that will change next year, regardless of who's sitting at the president's desk.

SNCJ Spotlight

States hoping to win in presidential race

Relations between the states and the federal government have been less than cordial since George W. Bush took over the Oval Office in 2001. The states have perpetually battled the Bush administration over what they perceive as its efforts to shift the state-federal balance of power in the latter direction. But state officials are hopeful that will change next year, regardless of who's sitting at the president's desk.

All through the Democratic National Convention in Denver last month, state leaders expressed confidence that an Obama presidency would be a boon for the states.

“All the governors need a partner in the White House, and Barack Obama has promised us that he will, in fact, be a partner with us,” said OHIO Gov. Ted Strickland (D).

That optimism stems, in part, from the fact that Obama would be the first former state legislator to serve as president since Jimmy Carter, and that he’s actually spent twice as much time in the ILLINOIS Statehouse than in Congress, eight years compared to four.

Democratic state leaders have also been encouraged by the pains the Obama campaign has taken to reach out to governors for support and advice.

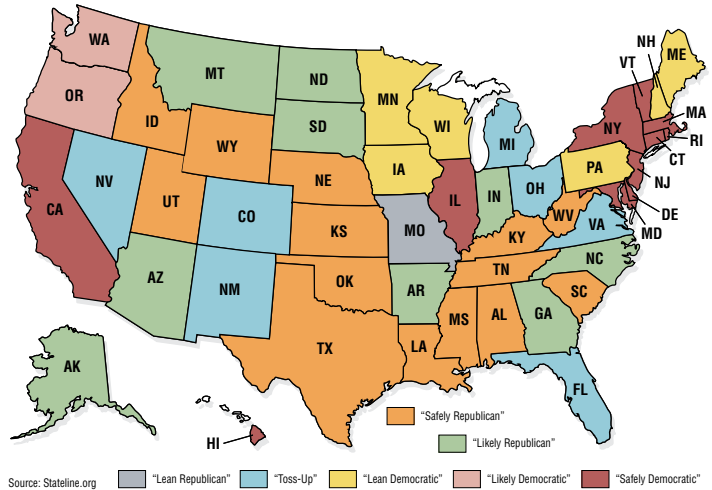
“We’ve sat down intimately with Barack,” said WEST VIRGINIA Gov. Joe Manchin (D), who chairs the Democratic Governors Association. “We’ve

had dinner. We’ve had discussions. We’ve been on phone calls. We’ve been talking

“All the governors need a partner in the White House, and Barack Obama has promised us that he will, in fact, be a partner with us.”

federal aid to help them deal with the budget troubles they’re facing now as a result of the mortgage crisis.

Bird’s eye view



2008 Electoral map turning shades of purple

As the presidential campaign season enters its final phase, there appears to be some political color-shifting going on in the states. Louis Jacobson, editor of Congress Now, an online publication affiliated with Roll Call, added five states to the “purple” category in his fourth assessment of state political leanings since the middle of last year. The new inductees, all formerly considered “Safely Republican” — ALASKA, INDIANA, MONTANA, NORTH DAKOTA and SOUTH DAKOTA — are now classified as “Likely Republican.” Jacobson also shifted FLORIDA and NEVADA from “Lean Republican” to “Toss-Up,” while bumping MISSOURI from “Toss-Up” to “Lean Republican,” leaving seven states representing 96 electoral votes in the category that will largely determine who reaches the magical 270 in November. Jacobson attributes the mostly blue-ward shift both to frustration with President Bush and the Obama campaign’s success in raising money, enabling it to campaign strongly in more states than previously expected.



about the problems we’re having state by state.”

And the Democratic governors have found much to like about Obama’s proposed solutions to those problems. For instance, Obama has proposed giving states \$50 billion in

A year after MINNESOTA's deadly bridge collapse, Obama said he also wants to direct \$60 billion over 10 years into a national infrastructure fund that would be used to repair roads, bridges, airports and rail systems in every state.

"He won't stand by when bridges collapse, while levees collapse," said MARYLAND Gov. Martin O'Malley (D)

Obama's ambitious plan to provide health insurance for all Americans, if enacted, would be another big relief for states, according to PENNSYLVANIA Gov. Ed Rendell (D).

"It wouldn't take the state out of providing dollars and services for health care, but it would lessen the burden that we have right now. Since I've been governor, the single biggest driver of our budget expansion has been increasing health care costs."

"I really believe if we get the nation going the right direction, which I believe Barack can do, then we won't have as many unfunded mandates coming down to the states."

State Democrats also believe an Obama presidency would finally relieve them of the burden of unfunded federal mandates they've suffered under the last eight years, the Real ID Act and No Child Left Behind, chief among them.

"I really believe if we get the nation going the right direction, which I believe Barack can do, then we won't have as many unfunded mandates coming down to the states," said WYOMING state Sen. John Hastert (D).

So the states' future under an Obama presidency looks pretty rosey, at least in the eyes of many Democrats. Some serious questions remain, however, about how Obama would pay for all of the programs he is proposing (see "The Mathematics of Change" in the Aug. 18 issue of SNCJ).

And how might the states fare under a McCain presidency? Democrats have charged that it would mean "four more years" of President Bush's policies. The two Republicans, in fact, don't appear to be far apart on many issues important to states, such as abortion, immigration and secure drivers' licenses. Both men oppose Congressional earmarks and have refused to support efforts to stimulate the economy by spending more on infrastructure improvements in the states. McCain also supports No Child Left Behind and backed the president's veto of a measure to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program because of its cost.

But one issue McCain and Bush don't agree on is global warming. The Bush administration has resisted state efforts to reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses — including MASSACHUSETTS' battle to force the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant under the Clean Air Act, and CALIFORNIA's campaign to win EPA approval to limit CO2 emissions from automobiles — fearing the economic impact of such regulation. McCain, however,



is less apprehensive. He wants to make companies pay for the right to pollute, while gradually reducing greenhouse gas emissions over time.

And although both men oppose gay marriage, in 2006 McCain withheld his support for a Constitutional amendment backed by Bush outlawing same-sex unions because he believed it would be an infringement of states' authority.

But regardless of the similarities and differences between McCain and Bush, Michael Bird, federal affairs counsel for the National Conference of State Legislatures, believes the states' relationship with McCain would undoubtedly be better than the one they have with the current administration.

"It's been so bad, it couldn't possibly get worse," he said. (STATELINE)

— *Compiled by Korey Clark*

Budget & taxes

CA REPUBLICANS OFFER ALTERNATIVE BUDGET PLAN: A couple of days before CALIFORNIA lawmakers adjourned their 2008 session last month, the majority Democrats made a last-ditch effort to end the state's budget standoff, calling for \$10 billion in cuts and the temporary 1-cent sales tax increase supported by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R). (See "SCHWARZENEGGER PROPOSES TEMPORARY SALES TAX HIKE" in Aug. But Republican legislators rejected the Democrats' proposal, arguing that it was not the right time for a tax hike.

"Our economy is suffering like it hasn't in decades," Senate Minority Leader Dave Cogdill (R) said the following day. "Raising taxes at this time is something that will definitely damage and hinder this economy at this time."

Not content to just play the role of spoilers, however, the Republicans also pitched their own budget plan, which substituted \$1.6 billion more in cuts and \$2 billion in borrowing against future proceeds from the state lottery for the sales tax hike.

Schwarzenegger proposed a plan to use lottery money to help close the state's budget gap earlier this year, but he and Democrats both questioned whether such borrowing would be legal without voter approval because the lottery was created through the initiative process. The governor went on to call his fellow Republicans' plan fiscally irresponsible, saying it just "pushes our problems to next year." Assembly Speaker Karen Bass (D), likewise, said the GOP plan would result in deficits "as far as the eye can see."

On Sept. 1, two months into the new fiscal year, state lawmakers broke their record for budget tardiness. And it looks as though they may extend that record indefinitely. (SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE)



BUDGETS IN BRIEF: OHIO's 10th District Court of Appeals ruled last week that it is unconstitutional for the state to apply the Commercial Activities Tax — a 26-cents-per-\$100 levy on all business sales over \$1 million, which took effect in 2005 — to food sold by grocery stores and food wholesalers that is not eaten on the premises. The ruling overturned a decision by a county judge upholding the tax (ASSOCIATED PRESS). • **CALIFORNIA's** unemployment fund could go broke by early next year, according to the latest projections. The Schwarzenegger administration fears that to keep the fund afloat the state may have to borrow from the federal government and use taxpayer money to pay off \$100 million it would incur in interest (LOS ANGELES).

— *Compiled by KOREY CLARK*

Politics & leadership

TOPSY-TURVY AZ PRIMARY: Upsets abounded in ARIZONA's legislative primary elections last Tuesday. The casualties included incumbents and favorites Senate President Pro Tem Robert Blendu (R), Sen. Tom O'Halleran (R), House Majority Whip John McComish (R) and Rep. Eddie Farnsworth (R).

“Instead of asking the question, ‘What was the surprise of the night,’ the question is, ‘What wasn’t the surprise,’ because everything was a surprise.”

“Instead of asking the question, ‘What was the surprise of the night,’ the question is, ‘What wasn’t the surprise,’ because everything was a surprise,” said political consultant Stan Barnes, who was attending the Republican National Convention in St. Paul but who spent most of the night

huddled around a computer in his hotel’s lobby with other ARIZONA delegates breathlessly following the vote tallies on the secretary of state’s Web site.

But Barnes said the “holy cow” surprise of the night was Farnsworth’s loss to incumbent Thayer Verschoor (R) in the District 22 Senate race, according to unofficial results.

“Everyone believed Farnsworth’s name and reputation would carry the day,” he said.

Democrats welcomed the losses by well-known incumbent Republicans in the House — particularly Blendu’s apparent loss to Jerry Weiers in District 12 and McComish’s apparent defeat by Jeff Dial in District 20 — believing it will only help them take the four seats they need to seize control of the chamber for the first time since the 1960s.

“Any time an incumbent loses, that’s a vacant seat and that’s easier for us,” said House Minority Leader Phil Lopes (D).

The only incumbent Democrat believed to have lost was Tucson Rep. Tom Prezelski, who was upset by both Matt Heinz and Daniel Patterson in a seven-way primary in District 29. (ARIZONA CAPITOL TIMES)

CA'S FRUITFUL SESSION SOURED BY BUDGET STALEMATE: By the time CALIFORNIA lawmakers wrapped up their 2008 session last month, they'd acted on over 1,000 bills and reached consensus on a number of significant issues.

For instance, they agreed on a measure providing for the identification and regulation of chemicals in everyday products that pose a health risk to Californians.

"We need to break the link between toxics and cancer in our society, find alternatives to the most toxic substances that we use every day, and we have to do it now," said Assemblyman Mike Feuer (D), author of the measure dubbed the "green chemistry initiative."

Golden State lawmakers also passed a bill aimed at curbing suburban sprawl, and, by extension, commute times and greenhouse gas emissions, by redirecting money designated for road construction into projects that locate homes near workplaces.

They also cracked down on the growing problem of metal theft, something they failed to do last year. The measure they approved would require scrap dealers to photograph, fingerprint and obtain address information from every seller and allow dealers to pay sellers only by check three days after a sales transaction.

"So much damage is done for so little gain," said Assemblyman Doug La Malfa (R). "This is one of the examples of government working well — finally."

Other notable legislative accomplishments this year include bills banning reading, text messaging or holding animals while driving, requiring the state's roughly 17,000 chain restaurants to post the calorie content of their food; prohibiting restaurants from using trans fats starting in 2010; and restricting health insurers' ability to cancel coverage retroactively by claiming that customers lied on their applications.

But all of those bills, as well as hundreds of others, are now in legislative limbo because Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R), who only has until Sept. 30 to sign or veto them, has vowed to do neither until lawmakers pass a budget.

The week in session

States in Regular Session: IL, MI, US

States in Recess: DC, NJ, NY, PA

Special Sessions in Recess: CA "a", CA "b", CA "c", CT "b", CT "c", CT "d", DE "b", PA "a"

States in Informal Session: MA

States in Skeleton Session: OH

States in Perfunctory Session: IL
Special Sessions "a"-x

States in Extended Session: CA (Budget)

States Currently Prefiling or Drafting for 2009: AL, FL, KY, MT, ND, NV, VA

States Adjourned in 2008: AK, AL, AZ, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, ME, MN, MO, MS, NC, NE, NH, NM, OK, RI, SC, SD, TN, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY

State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2008: AK "c", AK "d", AL "a", AR "a", CT "a", DE "a", KY "a", LA "a", LA "b", ME "a", MS "a", NC "b", NH "a", NM "a", NV "a", NY "a", OR "a", VA "a", VA "b", WI "c", WI "d", WI "e", WV "a", WV "b"

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS
(session information current as of 09/05/2008)
Source: State Net database



Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D) summed up the situation in characteristically caustic fashion: “We could have discovered a cure for drought, and this is what will be remembered: that we couldn’t pull a budget in on time.”

Assembly Speaker Karen Bass’ (D) review was a little more balanced.

“We’re walking away with a heavy heart because we don’t have a budget,” she said before adjourning Aug. 31, “but we did do a lot of work for the state of CALIFORNIA.” (LOS ANGELES TIMES)

POLITICS IN BRIEF: LOUISIANA Gov.

Bobby Jindal (R) postponed the state’s congressional primaries scheduled for this past weekend in the wake of Hurricane Gustav. Jindal said he acted on the advice of Secretary of State Jay Dardenne, who cited power outages and the high number of people away from their homes as sufficient reasons to put off the election (USA TODAY). • **NORTH CAROLINA’S** General Assembly handed Gov. Mike Easley (D) the first override in state history last week on a seemingly innocuous boat-towing bill. Easley vetoed the measure easing restrictions on towing boats last month, maintaining that it could put “families at a risk on the highways,” but frustrated lawmakers said safety issues had been considered thoroughly during debate on the bill, and statistics showed that few accidents involving towed boats had occurred in recent years (ASSOCIATED PRESS, STAR-NEWS [WILMINGTON]). • The **COLORADO** secretary of state’s office announced last week that Initiative 82, a measure that would have protected affirmative-action policies in the Centennial State, doesn’t have enough signatures to qualify for the November ballot. The initiative grew out of the effort to defeat Amendment 46, seeking to eliminate certain affirmative-action programs in the state, which will appear on the ballot (DENVER POST).

— *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 2008 prefiles last week: 17

Number of 2009 prefiles last week: 207

Number of Intros last week: 91

Number of bills enacted/adopted last week: 37

Number of 2008 prefiles to date: 20,716

Number of 2009 prefiles to date: 975

Number of Intros to date: 88,657

Number of bills enacted/adopted overall to date: 26,192

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS
(measures current as of 09/04/2008)
Source: State Net database

Governors

JINDAL EARNS PRAISE FOR GUSTAV MANAGEMENT: Hurricane Katrina will go down in history not only as a monumental example of Mother Nature’s ferocious power, but as a benchmark of governmental futility in



dealing with it. So it should not be surprising that when Gustav began bearing down on the Gulf Coast last week, local and state leaders made an all out effort to ensure they got it right this time.

By virtually all accounts, they succeeded. And with the storm now past, LOUISIANA Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) — in conjunction with oft-criticized New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin — is receiving most of the credit for making sure things went according to plan. Jindal and Nagin helped oversee the evacuation of more than 2 million people, one of the biggest and smoothest human evacuations in U.S. history. Both men were roundly praised for forcefully persuading a sometimes complacent populace to get out well ahead of the storm’s landfall.

That is in sharp contrast to how Nagin and former Gov. Kathleen Blanco (D) handled Katrina. Nagin in particular drew bitter criticism for not ordering the Crescent City to be evacuated until the day before Katrina hit, and then for poor leadership as the city fell into chaos amidst the post-storm devastation. Blanco also felt the heat, with critics calling her leadership weak and indecisive. She also had great difficulty working with the Bush administration during the crisis.

With those memories still fresh in the minds of many, Nagin and Jindal began ordering people out of the storm’s path on the Saturday before Gustav landed. The two leaders issued mandatory evacuation orders for the entire Louisiana coast, including all of New Orleans’ roughly 300,000 residents. Jindal also activated 3,000 National Guardsmen to provide security and help move people out.

Gustav ultimately spared New Orleans a direct hit, and claimed only 16 lives in the U.S., a far cry from the 1,600 deaths attributed to Katrina. Many locals credited

“This was excellent. On a 1 to 10, I give it 9. What they learned they learned from Katrina, that’s why this one has run so well.”

the movement of people out of the danger zone for keeping Gustav’s death toll to a minimum.

“This was excellent. On a 1 to 10, I give it 9. What they learned they learned from Katrina, that’s why this one has run so well,”

Upcoming elections

09/03/2008 - 09/24/2008

09/09/2008

Delaware Primary Election

House (All)

Senate Districts 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 16, 17, 21

Constitutional Officers: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Insurance Commissioner

US House (All)

US Senate (Joseph R. Biden, Jr.)

District of Columbia Primary Election

Council Ward 2, Ward 4, Ward 7, Ward 8; Member at Large

US House (Territory Delegate)

Minnesota Possible Special Primary

Senate District 16, Betsy L. Wergin;

District 63, Dan Larson

Minnesota Primary Election

House (All)

US House (All)

US Senate (Norm Coleman)

New Hampshire Primary Election

House (All)

Senate (All)

Constitutional Officers: Governor

US House (All)

US Senate (John E. Sununu)

New York Primary Election

US House (All)

continues on next page



said LeRoy Hartley, a defense attorney who waited out both storms in his elegant home on high ground a few blocks from the French Quarter.

Pelican State political observers said Jindal's performance likely earned him a plethora of political capital that could help him if he eventually aspires to higher office.

"You've got a governor who took charge," said Jim Duffy, a LOUISIANA native and national political consultant who has worked for several Louisiana Democrats. "It helps him a great deal. He already had a reputation of being this wunderkind."

"I think it's too early to talk about the presidency," said Marc Rotterman, a GOP media strategist based in NORTH CAROLINA, "but if he wants to be, he'll be a player for the next several decades."

Many of those observers credit both Jindal and Nagin for putting aside partisan differences to work together on the evacuation effort. "There was a sense of nonpartisan working together this time, where politics wasn't in the middle of it," said Ron Faucheux, another LOUISIANA native and longtime political consultant. Voters "want people to hunker down and do their jobs. Performance is good politics." (ASSOCIATED PRESS)

SCHWEITZER'S STAR ON THE RISE:
Bobby Jindal isn't the only governor earning kudos for a high profile public performance of late. MONTANA Gov. Brian Schweitzer's (D) emotional speech at the Democratic National Convention had pundits and political bloggers across the country calling him "the next Barack Obama" and predicting he could wind up serving in an Obama administration should the Democrat win the White House in November. Schweitzer has so far used his usual homespun humor to deflect such talk. In response to one interviewer who asked him if he would like to be energy secretary in an Obama administration, Schweitzer said, "Well, I've got to be honest with you, I'm not a very good typer. I don't think I could be anybody's secretary." Schweitzer's staff also insists that he is focused only on winning re-election in November. (GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE)

Upcoming elections (cont.)

09/03/2008 - 09/24/2008

Rhode Island Primary Election

House (All)
Senate (All)
US House (All)
US Senate (John F. Reed)

Vermont Primary Election

House (All)
Senate (All)
Constitutional Officers:
Governor, Lieutenant Governor,
Secretary of State,
Treasurer, Attorney General, Auditor of
Accounts
US House (All)

Wisconsin Primary Election

Assembly (All)
Senate (Even)
Constitutional Officers: Governor,
Lieutenant Governor,
Secretary of State, Treasurer, Attorney
General
US House (All)

09/13/2008

Louisiana First Party Primary

US House (All)
US Senate (Mary L. Landrieu)

09/16/2008

Massachusetts Primary Election

House (All)
Senate (All)
US House (All)
US Senate (John F. Kerry)

09/20/2008

Hawaii Primary Election

House (All)
Senate 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 12, 16, 18, 22, 23
US House (All)

09/23/2008

Mississippi Special Election

House District 114 (Guice)
continues on next page
New York Primary Election
US House (All)



GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: KENTUCKY Gov.

Steve Beshear (D) ordered several changes to how Bluegrass State officials enroll children in the state Children’s Health Insurance Program. Beshear said he hopes the streamlining will lead to the state insuring an additional 35,000 children by 2010. Changes include simplifying the application itself, giving applicants time to provide missing information and recruiting participants through other programs, such as free and reduced lunch and sending postcards to the parents of newborns to inform them about the program (LEXINGTON

“Well, I’ve got to be honest with you, I’m not a very good typer. I don’t think I could be anybody’s secretary.”

HERALD-LEADER). • The RHODE ISLAND chapter of the ACLU filed suit against Gov. Don Carcieri (R) in an effort to block his executive order that requires all contractors with the state to participate in the federal employment verification system known as E-Verify. The ACLU contends the federal system is “riddled with significant flaws” and returns inaccurate information regarding the immigration and employment status of new hires (PROVIDENCE JOURNAL). • ALASKA officials have hired a private lawyer to represent Gov. Sarah Palin (R) in the Legislature’s ongoing investigation into her firing of the state’s former public safety commissioner. Lawmakers are investigating whether Palin or others in her administration abused their power or improperly pressured former commissioner Walt Monegan to fire a state trooper who is Palin’s ex-brother-in-law (ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS).

— *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:

- College textbooks
- Prison health care
- No Child Left Behind

Hot issues

BUSINESS: The CALIFORNIA Senate approves SB 1420, which requires restaurant chains with 15 or more outlets to provide consumers with nutritional information on their menus and menu boards. It now moves to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) for review (LOS ANGELES TIMES). • The CALIFORNIA Assembly gives final endorsement to AB 1830, a measure that would bar home mortgage lenders from steering prospective home buyers to high-interest loans and offering incentives to brokers to do so. The bill would also bar brokers and lenders from making false statements about certain loans and eliminate amortized loans that lead a borrower to owe more on a loan than its original balance. The measure now heads to Schwarzenegger for consideration (LOS ANGELES TIMES). • Also in



CALIFORNIA, the Assembly signs off on AB 1860, a proposal that would make it illegal for Golden State businesses to sell a recalled product. The measure would also require retailers to remove such products from their stores, something that is now only voluntary under federal rules. The bill also goes to Schwarzenegger (R) for review (LOS ANGELES TIMES).

In case you missed it

Tough economic times and a general distrust of political leaders has led to dozens of tax and spending issues that will appear on state ballots on Nov. 4. But as we noted in the September 1 issue of SNCJ, voters should be careful what they wish for.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/09-01-2008/html

CRIME & PUNISHMENT: NEW JERSEY

officials announce that Facebook, the popular social networking Web site, will test the effectiveness of a new icon developed by the Garden State attorney general that is designed to make cyber abuses easier to report. The icon will appear on approximately 1.5 million Web pages and allow users a universal way to report abuses like threats of violence, inappropriate sexual content and suicide threats. Facebook officials say they will test the new system for six months (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER).

ENVIRONMENT: The Environmental Protection Agency vetoes a federal plan to build the world's largest water pump in the **MISSISSIPPI** Delta. The plan, nearly seven decades in the making, called for using the pump to move 6 million gallons of water a minute from 67,000 acres of wetlands along the Yazoo River, mostly to ease flood pressures on Magnolia State farms. The EPA said the project could potentially destroy thousands of acres of wetlands, impair water quality, and harm the habitat of threatened and endangered species, all violations of the federal Clean Water Act (WASHINGTON POST). • The **CALIFORNIA** Senate gives final approval to SB 375, a measure that would require local governments to submit regional development plans to state air regulators for approval. The measure is intended to force local municipalities to plan their growth so that homes, businesses and public transit systems are clustered together, thereby helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is now with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R), who has not indicated if he will sign it into law (SACRAMENTO BEE). • Still in **CALIFORNIA**, the Senate kills AB 2058, a measure that would have required stores that do not meet recycling goals to charge a 25-cent fee for plastic carryout bags (SACRAMENTO BEE).

HEALTH & SCIENCE: The **CALIFORNIA** Assembly gives final approval to AB 1945, which would allow health insurers to cancel policies only under specified conditions, such as the applicant proving false information on their application. Cancellations would also have to be reviewed by state regulators before they could go into effect. The Assembly also endorses AB 2549, a companion bill that would require insurers to continue covering the family members of people whose policies have been rescinded (LOS ANGELES TIMES).



SOCIAL POLICY: A NEW YORK state court upholds and executive order from Gov. David Paterson (D) that requires Empire State government agencies to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. A group of Republican lawmakers had challenged the order, contending that it usurped the Legislature’s power to decide the issue. They vowed to appeal the decision (NEW YORK TIMES).

— Compiled by RICH EHISEN

Once around the statehouse lightly

LOSE IT OR LOSE IT: Like many southern states, ALABAMA has long suffered from a serious obesity problem among its residents. That extra weight often leads to a variety of expensive health problems like diabetes and high blood pressure. That, as the *Huntsville Times* reports, has prompted the state to give its 37,000 public employees an ultimatum — start getting fit or, beginning in 2010, pay \$25 a month toward health insurance that is currently provided for free. ALABAMA thus becomes the only state to charge its workers for being zaftig. This isn’t exactly a new process, however, as the state already hits up smokers for \$24-per-month. So, Heart of Dixie state workers should consider themselves warned. Put down the cheese puffs and the remote and get thee to a treadmill, or be prepared to pay the price...literally.

BIO BOOST: ALASKA Gov. Sarah Palin may or may not ultimately help Republican Presidential candidate John McCain reach the White House, but being chosen as his running mate has already given a major career boost to the author who penned her biography. As reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, the tome, “Sarah: How a Hockey Mom Turned Alaska’s Political Establishment Upside Down,” was released in April. It was selling well in ALASKA, but until last week was as unknown in the lower 48 states as was Palin herself. No more. The book, generally described as a light and fast read, has recently jumped from virtual obscurity to No. 10 on the Amazon.com best sellers list, and No. 1 for political biographies.

TEEN DRIVER ON BOARD: Remember when those yellow and black, diamond-shaped “Baby On Board” signs began appearing in car rear windows? The point was to remind motorists to drive safely because many vehicles out there had kids in them. Now, as the *Rocky Mountain News* reports, a movement is afoot in COLORADO to require a similar decal for cars being driven by a teenager. Surprisingly, the effort was spurred not by state Rep. Randy Fischer, who is floating



the measure among his fellow lawmakers, but by a 16-year-old Denver high school student. J.R. Lopez says he and his buddies are tired of dealing with the blaring horns, shouted obscenities and one-finger salutes from other drivers who don't realize they are still learning. He believes it will make new drivers "feel safer" if the people around them know they are new drivers. We're pretty sure the other drivers would appreciate that infonugget as well.

Corrections

In the Business section of Hot Issues in the September 1 SNCJ, we incorrectly referred to CA SB 1375 as CA SB 1385. We regret the error.

GOVERNOR BEER PONG: Jeffrey Brown is nothing if not optimistic. As the *News Journal* of New Castle-Wilmington reports, DELAWARE elections officials recently added the 37-year-old Brown as a sanctioned candidate seeking to replace termed-out Gov. Ruth Ann Minner. Brown is a member of something called the Blue Enigma Party, which espouses a platform similar to many other parties, including more money for education and public safety, etc. But Brown himself is decidedly dissimilar to your average office-chaser. In his candidate statement on the Party's Web site, Brown refers to himself as a "SWM [single white male] able to leap tall buildings in a single bound." Further, his MySpace profile dubs him to be a beer pong champion, and lists his occupation as "bartender/stripper." His interests include "drinking, sports, and women." We will presume that he just forgot to mention public policy on that list.

— *By RICH EHISEN*



Editor: Rich Ehsen — capj@statenet.com

Associate Editor: Korey Clark — capj@statenet.com

Editorial Advisor: Lou Cannon

Correspondents: Richard Cox (CA), Steve Karas (CA), Bruce McKeeman (CA), Jeff Kinnison (CA), Chelsea Wolfe (CA), Linda Mendenhall (IL), Lauren King (MA) and Ben Livingood (PA)

Editorial Intern: Katherine Hasnain

Graphic Design: Vanessa Perez

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