

July 7, 2009

Dear Martha,

This is my fifteenth budget advocating for community colleges, from my time as a student advocate, through my early years with the League up until now. While this one may be the ugliest one, there are certainly patterns that emerge. Some call it the "budget dance"; others call it "kabuki" after the highly choreographed (and notably, all-male) Japanese dance-dramas.

California's budget pattern usually involves a deal appearing imminent and state leaders constructively working on a solution, only to quickly deteriorate until talks start over again. That's what has happened since I last updated you on the budget on Friday. Over the weekend, it appeared a solution was near after Democrats shelved their proposed tax hikes, but yesterday Assembly Speaker Karen Bass denounced the governor and boycotted the "Big 5" meeting of legislative leaders and the governor over Schwarzenegger's assistance of new anti-fraud measures in the in-home supportive services program.

In the big scheme of things, the setback probably won't delay the solution too long, although each day that passes makes the problems worse and requires the Legislature to find deeper cuts. Simply put, now that the fiscal year has started, you can't cut money that has already been legally encumbered or spent. Further, this week's expected report from the state controller on June revenues could cast a negative cloud over negotiations if revenues come in lower, as expected, which could wipe out the reserve Democrats are counting on minimizing to replace program cuts and tax increases.

Meanwhile, after Republicans announced that they would not support rule waivers for bills that failed to meet this Friday's policy committee deadline, Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg green-lighted the restart of committee hearings. Thus, the Legislature has a full day of bill hearings ahead, and it's unlikely we will see a floor session in either house. Another Big 5 meeting is scheduled today, although it's unclear when it will take place and whether Speaker Bass will return to the negotiating table.

I hope to have some encouraging news soon.



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