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COMMENTARY

Thursday, June 9, 2005

# A long, hot summer in Sacramento?

Get ready for another epic state budget fight. Although the California Constitution requires a state budget by June 15, Democratic tax-raisers already are preparing for a long battle.

"If the governor wants to debate the economic merits of investing in education, we will have a hot debate all summer long," is how Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, put it June 3 in an appearance at a public school in Sacramento, according to The Associated Press. "I stand ready with teachers, students and educators across this state to tell the truth about California's schools - our classrooms need more resources, plain and simple."

Among other budget proposals, Democrats in the Legislature are pushing a plan to raise income-tax increase funding for public schools.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, for his part, is trying to move the Democrats to the table by gearing up Nov. 8 ballot fight, in which today's biggest budget issues would be settled - if not in the Legislature, ballot box. The centerpiece of a special election would be an initiative to limit state spending increase average of the previous three annual revenue increases. The initiative would not take effect until the year, which begins July 1, 2006.

(Other initiatives in his potential ballot package include reforming teacher tenure and legislative redis

The governor has until June 13 to call the special election, and still could opt out if Mr. Núñez is only before working out a compromise.

As Mr. Núñez indicates, the Democrats are wielding education as their major weapon against the go

Whereas the governor's budget proposal for fiscal 2005-06, which begins July 1, includes no new tax Núñez's budget proposal includes \$1.2 billion a year in new taxes on upper-income taxpayers to pay education spending he says the governor promised last year.

But the Democrats' budget proposal itself is an excellent example of why the spending limitation initi The proposal does not address the auto-pilot spending that is the real source of the state's fiscal ail

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"In the last 10 years, spending has gone up faster than the personal income of Californians," Steven fellow at the Rose Institute of state and local Government at Claremont Mc- Kenna College, told us. ' something that can go on forever."

He said that Mr. Núñez "and his allies in the public employees' unions don't want to budge" on spend believe their posture "will bolster their hand on the ballot initiatives if they can paint the governor as b impervious to 'compromise.'"

The legislative budget conference committee currently is meeting. Its six members include two Demc Republican from each house. It will try for floor action on a budget sometime next week. Effectively, t committee's four Democrats have to come to agreement on a budget.

We can only urge the governor not to wait any longer, but to call the special Nov. 8 election. Reform delayed.

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