

Sample opinion editorial

Dear Editor:

Since Governor Schwarzenegger unveiled his proposed 2008–09 budget in January, there has been a lot of talk coming from Sacramento that California must “live within its means.” In his state of the state address, the governor said, “we don’t have a revenue problem; we have a spending problem.” Within minutes of his speech, state legislators lined up for the media to immediately declare that new taxes are off the table, and that the only way to address this — just the latest in a series of fiscal crises that have plagued California in the past 30 years — is to inflict painful, across-the-board cuts.

It is incumbent upon everyone who supports public education to reject, without equivocation, the governor’s notion. It is also imperative that educators begin to dispel the myth that California schools are failing. For example:

- California currently has the highest academic standards in the nation. This is a simple fact.
- California currently finds itself in the bottom five in the nation with respect to per-pupil funding. Again, this is not an issue at debate; it is an established fact.
- Public schools have had imposed on them the most byzantine, difficult to understand budget process in either the public or private sector. Governing boards of schools have very little at their disposal in the way of discretionary funds. In nearly every instance, the money that flows to local schools from the state comes with strings attached. And in many of those instances, those funds are tied up in programs that have no demonstrable link to student achievement. Yet, when those programs fail to perform as anticipated the schools get blamed.

Add all of this together, and I have to ask: how bad do things have to get in order for our state’s leaders to reach the conclusion that should be self-evident: until and unless we change the tenor of the debate to have the RIGHT conversation about schools — specifically, about what kind of schools we need in order for our students to achieve those high standards, and what it will cost to create those schools.

And please don’t ask me what cuts the education community would suggest to help the governor balance this budget. We are not qualified to make judgments along the likes of “how many highway patrolmen must be taken off of the streets in order to pay for better teacher salaries” — there are leaders in Sacramento who were elected to make those decisions. Now, if they would like to abdicate their responsibility (which, in effect, they already have) and transfer some revenue-raising authority to the local level, we are certainly open to that conversation. But until those leaders recognize that revenues MUST be on the table, then why should we even engage in the discussion? It’s time for them to put ALL their cards on the table.

California was once viewed as the promised land at the edge of the new frontier. In his remarks following the release of his proposed budget, Governor Schwarzenegger made a comment that we now aspire to be more like Arkansas. If that is truly what the citizens of this great state want, then so be it. I happen to want more, as do the students, teachers, administrators and staff of the schools for which I have responsibility. I implore our state leaders to develop a profile in courage that will allow them to address the fiscal crisis in a responsible, equitable fashion.

Sincerely,

Name
Title
District
Mailing address
Phone number

