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February 02, 2007

Placement of Sex Offenders: Confronting a Community Challenge**Collaborative Summit Planned for State and Local Leaders**

By James Keene, Executive Director

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California counties have been challenged by state leaders to take a leadership role in a burgeoning policy regarding the placement of high-risk sex offenders (HRSO) and sexually violent predators (SVP). It is a daunting task, but one that needs our attention if we expect to meet our commitments to the varied needs of our communities.

This week, the CSAC Administration of Justice Policy Committee adopted a policy statement to present to the CSAC Executive Committee and Board of Directors, which directs our activities on this critical issue, as follows:

Counties commit to fully engaging in a collaborative process to define issues and seek solutions related to appropriate placement and housing of HRSOs and SVPs. This effort, in counties' view, must be founded in a committed partnership between state and local governments, must contain a local or regional planning process, and must consider the needs, capacity, and availability of resources in local communities.

To advance this collaborative effort, CSAC intends to sustain a leadership role in planning the March 2007 statewide summit on HRSO/SVP housing and will seek active and engaged involvement of county supervisors and a range of key county partners — both for purposes of the summit and in the broader context of future policy discussions and intergovernmental decision making processes.

Assembly Member and former Orange County Supervisor Todd Spitzer joined the Administration of Justice Policy Committee at its meeting on January 31. Assembly Member Spitzer, who served as Co-Chair of the Governor's Task Force on HRSOs and SVPs, strongly urged county supervisors to engage in discussions with the state regarding the development of collaborative solutions to appropriately place and supervise this population.

To that end, CSAC is working with the Governor's Office, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and the League of California Cities to sponsor a statewide summit on the subject of placement and housing of sex offenders. CSAC is responsible for coordinating attendance of county officials and affiliates and will be working to assure broad county participation at the event.

The event is scheduled for Monday, March 19 at the Radisson Hotel (Leisure Lane) in Sacramento. The one-day summit will bring together city, county, and state leaders, along with other concerned parties, to collaboratively identify and define solutions for placing HRSOs and SVPs. The summit will likely be followed by additional policy discussions and potential

legislative actions, so it is very important for counties to have an informed and active presence during the summit. (Counties will receive more detailed information on the summit early next week.)

We need your help and engagement in this process to ensure that appropriate and safe outcomes are realized for California's communities. Certainly, it is a difficult policy area to cope with, but counties are key partners with the state in finding solutions regarding housing and supervision needs of sex offenders. The challenge is great, but counties' active participation is crucial to a successful outcome.

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2007-08 State Budget Highlights

For a complete review of the 2007-08 State Budget, [click here](#).

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Calendar of Events

Don't miss these important [upcoming events](#).

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Ask CSAC's Legislative Advocates

Questions? Need more information? Contact our [legislative staff](#) for the answers you need.

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Track Legislation on CSAC's Web site

Review all the [bills](#) CSAC is watching on our Web site.

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Administration of Justice

For more information, contact Elizabeth Howard at 916/327-7500, ext. 537 or ehoward@counties.org.

Fine and Forfeiture MOEs

AB 227 (Beall) – Co-sponsor

AB 227, by Assembly Member Jim Beall, would make permanent adjustments to counties' fine and forfeiture maintenance of effort (MOE) obligations, based on reductions resulting from two previous legislative measures. Counties will recall that AB 139 (Chapter 74, Statutes of 2005) codified a negotiated resolution regarding undesignated court-related fees and, among other items, established a process for determining a county buyout of civil assessment revenue. Pursuant to AB 145 (Chapter 75, Statutes of 2005), the Uniform Civil Fees (UCF) and Standard Fee Schedule Act of 2005, counties received a buyout of the county portion of certain fees designated by AB 233, the Trial Court Funding Act of 1997. AB 227 would simply codify each county's fine and forfeiture MOE obligation, adjusted for any reductions resulting from the collective application of AB 139 and AB 145.

AB 227 clarifies that the distribution of the fine and forfeiture revenue collected above the MOE threshold would continue to be calculated on previously established MOE levels, not the adjusted amounts to be codified by this measure. This measure reflects agreements arrived at between local courts and counties regarding appropriate buyout levels and will offer counties greater clarity and certainty when processing quarterly MOE payments. We urge all counties to review the provisions of AB 227 and to support this important measure.

Public Interest Attorney Loan Repayment Program

AB 171 (Beall) – Sponsor

AB 171, also by Assembly Member Jim Beall, seeks to expand eligibility for a public interest attorney loan repayment program (LRP) to include county counsels. Education Code Section 69740 establishes the LRP for attorneys that chose to practice in a specified public interest area of the law, defined as "a local (1) legal services organization, (2) prosecuting attorney's office, (3) child support agency office, or (4) criminal public defender's office. AB 171 would simply expand the list of practice areas to include work in a county counsel's office. CSAC is sponsoring this measure on behalf of the County Counsels' Association and will look forward to broad county support as this measure makes its way through the legislative process.

Comprehensive Review of California's Criminal Justice System

LAO Publishes Primer

Counties should be aware that the Legislative Analyst's Office released this week a comprehensive review of the current state of California's criminal justice system. The primer covers information on current crime trends in California, discusses both the adult and juvenile justice systems, and analyzes costs associated with crime and corrections. The report concludes that the two major and most immediate challenges facing policy makers are (1) managing crowding in the state prison system and (2) developing correctional rehabilitation programs for inmates and parolees. The full text of the report is available at <http://www.lao.ca.gov>.

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Agriculture and Natural Resources

For more information, please contact Karen Keene at 916/327-7500, ext. 511, or e-mail: kkeene@counties.org.

Air Quality

ARB Announces Series of Off-Road Diesel Vehicle Workshops

The California Air Resources Board has scheduled four workshops across the state to shed light on the in-use off-road diesel vehicle rule. The rule applies to diesel powered off-road vehicles at or greater than 25 horsepower, and workshops will be held on Feb. 20 in San Diego, Feb. 23 in Fresno, Feb. 26 in Sacramento, and Mar. 1 in Riverside. For more information, please visit <http://www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/ordiesel/workshops.htm>.

Fire Protection

CDF Changes Name to CAL FIRE

The Dept. of Forestry and Fire Protection, commonly referred to as CDF, has changed its colloquial name to CAL FIRE. The new nickname came about in last year's AB 1423, and is meant to more accurately describe the fire protection, resource conservation and Office of the State Fire Marshall functions of the Department. For now, the Department's Web site can still be found at www.cdf.ca.gov.

Conservation

AB 188 (Aghazarian) – Pending - Request Comments

Assembly Bill 188, as introduced by Assembly Member Greg Aghazarian, would require the Resources Agency to establish and maintain a central public registry of all conservation easements and agricultural conservation easements. The registry would include all easements granted since January 1, 2000. AB 188 also includes a provision to make the registry available for public view no later than 2009. The earliest AB 188 may be heard in committee is February 25, and CSAC is seeking comments from counties on the feasibility of creating a statewide conservation easement registry. Please contact Karen Keene at kkeene@counties.org.

Economic Development

For more information, please contact Steve Keil at 916/327-7500, ext. 521, or e-mail: skeil@counties.org.

Governor Appoints Conway Chair of the Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley

Governor Schwarzenegger has announced his picks to serve on the Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, including naming Connie Conway, Tulare County Supervisor, as chair. Other county supervisors on the board include Frank Bigelow, Madera County Supervisor and CSAC President; Kathleen Crookham, Merced County Supervisor; Alfred "Leroy" Ornellas, San Joaquin County Supervisor; and Ray Watson, Kern County Supervisor.

The Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley was created by the Governor in 2005 to make recommendations regarding changes that would improve the economic well-being of the Valley and the quality of life of its residents.

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Elections

For more information, please contact Karen Keene at 916/327-7500, ext. 511, or e-mail: kkeene@counties.org.

Speaker Announces Redistricting Reform

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez has announced a legislative proposal to change redistricting in California. While no bill number has yet been assigned to the proposal, the bill's author, Assembly Member and Chair of the Assembly Elections and redistricting Committee Curren Price Jr., has outlined the following details:

- The bill would create a diverse and bipartisan commission of 11 members, including commissioners who are Democrats, Republicans and not registered with either of those parties.
- Commissioners may not have held or run for office for the three preceding years or have been employed as lobbyists or by a campaign committee, political party, or the Legislature during that time.
- Commissioners would have to pledge not to run for office for three years after their terms on the commission end.
- Redistricting would be limited to once a decade unless a court orders otherwise.
- The commission would be required to comply with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act and the California Public Records Act.
- Districts drawn up by the commission would be geographically contiguous.
- A public hearing will be required at all stages of the process – before maps are drawn, once tentative maps are drawn by the commission, and again on the proposed final commission maps.

The proposed bill would join the current pack of redistricting bills, including ACA 1 (Dymally) and ACA 4 (Villines).

AB 119 (Price) – Support

Assembly Bill 119, as introduced by Assembly Member Curren Price, would require the state to reimburse a county for the cost of any election called by the Governor to fill a state legislative or congressional vacancy. CSAC is in support of the bill, which is similar to bills in the previous two years that have accomplished the same goal, albeit for the term of a single calendar year. CSAC will also be working with counties to determine an equitable formula for reimbursement should AB 119 become law.

SB 113 (Calderon, et al.) – Pending - Request Comments

Senate Bill 113, as introduced by Senators Calderon, Battin, Migden and Oropeza, would move California's presidential primary election from June to February 5 of 2008. SB 113 is almost identical to AB 157 (Plescia). However, SB 113 has been set for a hearing in the Senate Elections, Redistricting, and Constitutional Amendments Committee on February 7, of which Senator Calderon is chair.

CSAC is seeking comments from counties on both AB 157 and SB 113, because if either bill were enacted, county elections officials would have to administer three statewide elections in the span of 10 months (February, June and November).

Also, both bills identify a February presidential primary election as a state mandate, but questions remain about the true cost of this type of election. Therefore, CSAC is also seeking cost estimates from counties to shed light on this issue. Please contact Karen Keene at kkeene@counties.org.

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Health and Human Services

For more information, contact Kelly Brooks at 916/327-7500 ext. 531, e-mail kbrooks@counties.org or Qiana Charles at 916/327-7500, ext. 564, e-mail qcharles@counties.org.

Health Care Coverage Update

Senate Republicans Unveil Proposal

On January 30, the Senate Republican Caucus unveiled their health care coverage proposal. Proposing to use existing dollars to care for the states most vulnerable, the Republican plan seeks to expand clinical care facilities while placing an emphasis on preventive medicine. They are calling their plan CalCARE.

The plan does not mandate that all California residents buy health care coverage, but rather provides incentives for employers who already provide health benefits for their employees. Individuals who purchase health care coverage will receive the same tax benefit as an employer purchasing coverage for its employees. CalCARE also calls for the federal government to pay the mandated health care costs for undocumented individuals. In addition, the Senate Republican plan will request that the Legislature and California voters reallocate \$500 million in First Five Commission funds for children's health initiatives. The plan redirects a significant portion of the \$2 billion allocated to Disproportionate Share Hospitals (DSH) with the goal on incentivizing additional clinic creation and expansion. The proposal also calls for changing the benefit structure of the Medi-Cal program to align more closely to private benefits.

The CalCARE proposal also includes changes to California's tax law, including: (1) conforming state law to federal law to provide tax incentives to businesses and individuals to utilize Health Savings Accounts, (2) provide a tax credit to providers who invest in health information technology, and (3) provide employers a tax credit for making contributions to Health Savings Accounts.

CSAC staff will continue to provide updates on various health care reform packages as more information becomes available.

The Governor Seeks Appointees for the Public Health Advisory Committee

The Governor's Office, the California Health and Human Services Agency, and the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) are seeking applications for appointees to the Public Health Advisory Committee.

The California Public Health Act of 2006, Chapter 241, Statutes of 2006 (SB 162 Ortiz) created a new California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to administer specified public health programs currently administered by CDHS. SB 162 also established a Public Health Advisory Committee (PHAC) of 15 members, nine of whom are gubernatorial appointees. These appointments do not require Senate confirmation. Each member appointed by the Governor will serve for four years, beginning July 1, 2007. PHAC members will serve on a voluntary basis and not receive any compensation. However, members will be reimbursed for the reasonable costs incurred for travel to PHAC meetings.

The statute describes the PHAC as including representatives from a broad cross-section of public health stakeholders who

understand public health issues facing both rural and urban populations throughout California, including academia, biotechnology, business, community-based organizations, emergency services, local government, health departments, medicine, nursing, public health laboratories, social marketing, consumers, and other sectors of the public health community.

Applicants interested in being considered as gubernatorial appointees to the PHAC must first complete the online application on the CDHS Web site home page at www.dhs.ca.gov and then the online appointments application on the Governor's Web site, <http://gov.ca.gov/appointments/application/>.

The deadline for submission of applications is March 1, 2007.

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Housing, Land Use and Transportation

For more information, contact DeAnn Baker at 916/327-7500, ext. 509, dbaker@counties.org or Kiana Buss at 916/327-7500, ext. 566, kbuss@counties.org.

Infrastructure Bond Update

In the past week, CSAC has learned that the administration is poised to release numerous proposals related to many different accounts contained in the infrastructure bond package.

CSAC and the League of California Cities held a joint meeting this week with numerous city and county public works officials and representatives from the Office of Senate President Pro tem Perata, Speaker Nunez's Office and Senator Dutton's office, as well as with the Department of Finance and the Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The focus of the meeting was on the development of accountability measures for the \$2 billion in Proposition 1B for local streets and roads. We are charged with developing a parallel process to the Governor's Executive Order that outlined accountability for state departments having oversight over bond monies. These efforts remain ongoing.

Local Streets and Roads Needs Assessment

CSAC and the League of California Cities gave a presentation to the California Transportation Commission (CFC) on January 31 regarding the status and future needs of the local roadway system. Supervisor Mike McGowan from Yolo County provided introductory remarks and George Johnson, Transportation Director from Riverside County; Brian McDermott, Siskiyou County Public Works Director; Mike Duncan, Assistant Public Works Director from the City of Fairfield; and Shanna O'Hare, a Senior Transportation Planner from the City of Oakland provided the commission with both an urban/rural and city/county perspective of our local streets and roads.

In addition to educating the commission as to the current and estimated future conditions of our local system, CSAC and the League seized this opportunity to also ask for the commission's partnership and support for our statewide needs assessment proposal of the local roadway system. The presentation was well received by the commission and we were pleased that they also saw the local streets and roads needs assessment proposal as an integral component of a seamless, multi-modal system in California. We are charged with working with CTC staff and coming back with further recommendations at the commission's June meeting.

Housing

SB 65 (Cedillo) – Watch

SB 65, as introduced by Senator Gil Cedillo, would make technical nonsubstantive changes to the requirement that the Department of Housing and Community Development adopt regulations to govern the use and occupancy of manufactured homes, mobilehomes, and recreational vehicles located in special occupancy parks.

SB 65 was introduced on January 16, and is currently awaiting a committee assignment in the Senate. CSAC expects to see future amendments to this measure, as in its current form is simply a spot bill.

SB 127 (Kuehl) – Watch

SB 127, as introduced by Senator Sheila Kuehl, would require, in the case of a sale of real property, or a sale or a lease with an option to purchase of a mobilehome or manufactured home, that the disclosures concerning characteristics affecting the property and hazards to which the property may be subject be made within three days of the execution of an offer to purchase.

SB 127 was introduced on January 23, and has been referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. No hearings on the measure have been scheduled at this time.

Land Use**SB 2 (Cedillo) – Request for Comment**

SB 2, as amended on January 22 by Senator Gil Cedillo, would, among other things, add emergency shelters and transitional housing to the provision that a locality provide for sufficient sites with zoning that permits owner-occupied and multifamily residential use by right, including the development of farmworker housing for low- and very low-income households, and would revise the requirements by which a local government may identify sites suitable for the development of emergency shelters, transitional housing, and rental multifamily residential developments under these provisions. The bill would also require local governments to designate zones where special needs facilities and transitional housing are a permitted use, either by right or subject to a conditional use permit.

SB 2 has been referred to the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee. No hearings on this measure have been scheduled at this time.

SB 12 (Lowenthal) – Pending

SB 12, as amended on January 29 by Senator Alan Lowenthal, would, until January 1, 2015, revise the regional housing needs allocation procedure for the Southern California Association of Governments. SB 12 was passed out of the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee on January 23 by a vote of 7 to 0. The measure is currently awaiting a vote by the entire Senate.

Transportation**AB 117 (Beall) – Pending**

AB 117, as introduced by Assembly Member Jim Beall, would provide that, until January 1, 2010, a county may elect to levy an additional assessment in the amount of \$2 for every \$10 or fraction thereof, upon each base fine, not including other penalty assessments, fees, or additions, imposed and collected by the county for an offense involving the unsafe operation of a motor vehicle upon the highway in violation of the Vehicle Code or a local ordinance adopted pursuant to the Vehicle Code. The monies collected from the additional assessment would be deposited in a Traffic Safety Committee Network Fund. Monies in the fund, after deducting administrative costs, not to exceed 10% of the amount of the fund, would be allocated in a manner so that 85% be used for local traffic safety programs approved by the county board of supervisors, as specified, and 15% be deposited in the county's Courthouse Construction Fund.

This bill was introduced on January 9, and is currently awaiting a committee assignment in the Assembly.

SB 10 (Kehoe) – Watch

SB 10, as amended on January 31 by Senator Christine Kehoe, would designate the San Diego Association of Governments as the entity responsible for coordinating the airport planning of public agencies within San Diego County.

SB 10 has been referred to the Senate Local Government committee and is scheduled for a hearing on February 7.

SB 53 (Ducheny) – Pending

SB 53, as introduced by Senator Denise Ducheny, would require the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to develop specified performance measures to establish an evaluation and rating of the overall quality of the state highway system, and would require an annual report to the Legislature in that regard.

This measure was introduced on January 10 and is currently awaiting a hearing in the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee.

SB 56 (Runner) – Pending

SB 56, as introduced by Senator George Runner, would declare the intent of the Legislature to authorize a demonstration program that would allow a careful examination of the benefits and challenges of using a design-build method of procurement for transportation projects. This bill would, until January 1, 2016, authorize certain state and local transportation entities to use a design-build process for contracting on transportation projects.

SB 56 was introduced on January 10, and has been referred to the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee. No hearings on the measure have been scheduled at this time.

SB 61 (Runner) – Pending

SB 61, as introduced by Senator George Runner, would revise the process for entering into a development lease agreement with public-private entities for the construction of transportation projects primarily designed for goods movement.

SB 61 was introduced on January 16, and has been referred to the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee. No hearings on the measures have been scheduled at this time.

SB 111 (Ashburn) – Watch

SB 111, as introduced by Senator Roy Ashburn, would implement Senate Constitutional Amendment 4 (description found below) also introduced by Senator Ashburn.

SB 111 was introduced on January 18, and has been assigned to the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee. No hearings on the measure have been scheduled at this time.

SCR 3 (Cedillo) – Watch

SCR 3, as introduced by Senator Gil Cedillo, would request Caltrans to erect informational signs on a specified portion of State Highway Route 5, in the County of Los Angeles, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources covering that cost, directing motorists to The Wall Las Memorias Project AIDS monument.

SCR 3 has been referred to the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee. No hearings on the measure have been scheduled at this time.

SCA 4 (Ashburn) – Watch

SCA 4, as introduced by Senator Roy Ashburn, would eliminate the 15-year exclusion from classification as "new construction" of structures constructed of unreinforced masonry bearing wall construction and would instead generally exclude from classification as "new construction" the specific portion of construction or reconstruction of seismic retrofitting components on an existing structure. Currently, the California Constitution excludes from classification as "new

construction" the portion of reconstruction or improvement to a structure, constructed of unreinforced masonry bearing wall construction, necessary to comply with any local ordinance relating to seismic safety during the first 15 years following the reconstruction or improvement.

SCA 4 was introduced on January 18, and has been referred to the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee and the Elections, Reapportionment, and Constitutional Amendments Committee. No hearings on the measure have been scheduled at this time.

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Indian Gaming

For more information, contact DeAnn Baker at 916/327-7500, ext. 509, dbaker@counties.org or Kiana Buss at 916/327-7500, ext. 566, kbuss@counties.org.

AB 132 (Garcia) – Pending

AB 132, as introduced by Assembly Member Bonnie Garcia, would make technical nonsubstantive changes to the provisions regarding the Indian Gaming Special Distribution Fund.

This measure was introduced on January 12, and is currently awaiting a committee assignment in the Assembly. CSAC expects future amendments to this measure, as it is only a spot bill at this time.

AB 169 (Levine) – Pending

AB 169, as introduced by Assembly Member Lloyd Levine, would provide that 16 federally recognized Indian tribal governments may participate in the Southern California Association of Governments, a joint powers authority, for specified purposes and subject to specified conditions in the six-county region of the Southern California Association of Governments.

This measure was introduced on January 23, and is currently awaiting a committee assignment in the Assembly.

SB 62 (Florez) – Pending

SB 62, as introduced by Senator Dean Florez, would provide that if there are insufficient funds in the Indian Gaming Special Distribution Fund to fully fund payments to eligible recipient tribes from the Indian Gaming Revenue Sharing Trust Fund, money from payments by tribes to the General Fund pursuant to any tribal-state compact shall be transferred to the Indian Gaming Revenue Sharing Trust Fund in an amount equal to the deficiency, in order to supplement the payments to be made from the Indian Gaming Special Distribution Fund to the Indian Gaming Revenue Sharing Trust Fund.

SB 62 was introduced on January 16 and is currently awaiting a hearing in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee. No hearings on the measure have been scheduled at this time.

SB 106 (Wiggins) – Pending

SB 106, as introduced by Senator Patricia Wiggins, would ratify the tribal-state gaming compact entered into in 2006 between the State of California and the Yurok Tribe of the Yurok Reservation. The bill would require that related revenue contributions be deposited into the General Fund and would also specify that, in deference to tribal sovereignty, certain actions may not be deemed projects for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act.

SB 106 was introduced on January 17, and is currently awaiting a committee assignment in the Senate.

Revenue and Taxation

For more information, contact Jean Hurst at 916/327-7500, ext. 515, or rhurst@counties.org, or Geoffrey Neill at 916/327-7500, ext. 567, or gneill@counties.org.

PPIC Releases Report on Government Budget Priorities

This week, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) released a new report titled *Fiscal Realities: Budget Tradeoffs in California Government*, by Tracy M. Gordon, Jaime Calleja Alderete, Patrick J. Murphy, Jon Sonstelie, and Ping Zhang. The report, which is nearly 250 pages long, takes a fresh, comprehensive look at the way California governments as a whole spend their money as compared to other states, then examines what kinds of tradeoffs would be required to give Californians what they consistently say they want.

One of the report's key qualities is the way it does not confine its examination to one level of government from another, which is important when comparing states' revenues and services since the level of government that receives certain revenues and provides certain services is largely a matter of local tradition. For instance, in only two other states do counties provide the vast array of state services.

Moving through systematic analyses of several subject areas – both levels of education, health, social services, transportation, public safety, environment/housing, and administration – the report then goes through some potential tradeoffs, illustrating that many goals are quite expensive. For instance, the perennially high-polling proposal of increasing K-12 staffing levels to the national average would cost more than twice as much as would be raised by increasing the property tax rate to the national average and five times more than could be saved by reducing corrections costs per inmate to national levels.

Fiscal Realities, especially when combined with the PPIC's CA 2025 materials, provides an important benchmark from which nearly all major policy issues facing the state can be evaluated, and can help Californians answer the question of what kind of state we want to be.

Sales and free downloads of the report are available at PPIC's Web site: www.ppic.org.

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Washington, D.C., Report

For more information, contact Joe Krahn, Waterman and Associates, 202/898-1444, or e-mail jkrahn@wafed.com.

President Bush delivered his State of the Union address on January 23 before a new Congress, a nationally televised audience and, for the first time in the nation's history, a female Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi of California.

The president briefly outlined his domestic policy agenda, which calls on lawmakers to reform immigration, expand health care coverage, extend his "No Child Left Behind" program, and reform energy policies. However, almost half of his 40-minute speech was dedicated to the ongoing war overseas.

Appointed by Democratic leaders to give the party's response to the president's State of the Union address, freshman Senator Jim Webb (D-VA) noted the public's strong opposition to the commander-in-chief's war strategy in Iraq. The former Vietnam War veteran criticized the president for entering the war recklessly and subjecting Americans to the high costs associated with the conflict.

On the legislative front, the House was not in session for a good part of the past two weeks as Republicans attended their two-day retreat the week of January 22, with Democrats leaving town for their two-day hiatus late the week of January 29.

Before adjourning, however, House members approved January 31 a \$463.5 billion continuing resolution (CR) for fiscal year 2007, which began October 1, 2006. The measure would fund the government through the end of the fiscal year (September 30) and must be enacted prior to February 15 to avert a government shutdown.

The CR (H J Res 20) would freeze most domestic spending programs at fiscal 2006 levels and shift billions of dollars among various discretionary accounts. Under the resolution, a number of Democratic priorities would receive additional funding,

including veterans' health care, Pell education grants, and the National Institutes of Health.

Additionally, the CR includes a \$3.5 billion boost for the federal highway program, an increase that was specified under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). After it appeared as though the CR might not include the scheduled increase in transportation funding, every member of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee and 72 senators signed on to letters requesting that funding levels be increased over the fiscal year 2006 level.

Although the CR was overwhelmingly cleared in the House by a vote of 286 to 140, the road to passage is expected to be bumpier in the Senate. Nevertheless, Senate leaders are aiming to have the spending measure considered on the floor the week of February 5.

In other notable developments, key lawmakers are making a strong push to renew the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, which expired last September. Specifically, Congressmen Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Greg Walden (R-OR) spearheaded a bipartisan letter to House leaders, requesting that they include language in the upcoming 2007 emergency supplemental appropriations bill that would extend and fully fund the program. The final letter was sent to the House leadership on January 30 and included 95 signatures, 21 of which were members of the California congressional delegation.

President Bush is expected to submit his emergency supplemental spending request to Congress shortly after he unveils his fiscal 2008 budget proposal on February 5. The president's supplemental request would primarily fund ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In other news, during the week of January 29, members of the Senate continued to wrestle with several proposals regarding criticism of President Bush's troop buildup in Iraq. Late in the week, however, it appears that many senators are rallying around one measure (S 470) that would express the chamber's opposition to the troop increase. Despite the bipartisan support, it is not clear if the measure has the required 60 votes to break a potential filibuster.

In other Senate action, lawmakers approved February 1 legislation that would increase the minimum wage from \$5.25 to \$7.25 an hour by 2009. The House passed last month a clean minimum wage bill (HR 2). The Senate version, in contrast, includes an \$8.3 billion tax package intended to support small businesses to help offset the minimum wage hike. A House-Senate conference is expected to meet soon to resolve differences between the two competing versions.