



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on May 21, 2009

California Budget Blues

“Voters used Tuesday’s election to rebuke the governor and lawmakers, whose job approval ratings are at record lows, according to the latest Field Poll,” [Reuters noted](#) that same day. Field Poll director Mark DiCamillo was quoted as saying that the voters “were sending a message of anger.” According to Reuters, despite “dire warnings of fiscal calamity by Schwarzenegger,” voters “said they disliked the specifics in the measures — including a spending cap, extending tax increases, borrowing against lottery revenues and tapping dedicated funds.” State Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg said legislators “will need to craft a lean budget as soon as possible. ‘The voters have spoken and they are telling us that government should do the best it can with the money it has.’ ”



“Without voter approval for the measures,” Reuters said, “California would face a \$21.3 billion deficit, according to Schwarzenegger, who with the state’s Democrat-led legislature put the measures to voters as part of a February budget compromise to close a nearly \$42 billion shortfall through June 2010.” The *New York Times* mentioned that the defeat at the polls has prompted Governor Schwarzenegger to request “a \$6 billion loan from the federal government” and to propose “a variety of politically unpalatable cuts, including commuting prisoners’ sentences, taking away health insurance from some poor children, reducing aid to community colleges and eliminating a large chunk of financing for shelters that serve children and women who have been abused.”

The *Times* noted that other voices in California are clamoring for a state constitutional convention “to address such things as the state’s arcane budget requirements and its process for proliferate ballot initiatives.” “There could not be more of a tipping point,” said Jim Wunderman, “chief executive of the Bay Area Council, a business group that moved forward on Wednesday with plans to push for a constitutional convention.”

Considering the different solutions mentioned above, there are some things to keep in mind. Reuters pointed out the statement of Daniel Mitchell of the University of California Los Angeles’s School of Public Affairs: “If we got what they’ve already thrown at the auto industry, that would solve our problems for the next year or two.” Indeed it would, but Governor Schwarzenegger’s request for federal money is actually a request for taxpayer dollars; he is asking everyone in America to help bail out his state. Are taxpayers in the other 49 states responsible for the poor decision making of California’s political leadership? No, they are not, and California’s taxpaying voters — who *are* responsible for electing that leadership — have already expressed their will at the polls. What makes California any



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more deserving of a federal bailout than another state? If Uncle Sam bails out one state, eventually he will have to bail out the other 49. Opening this Pandora's box can't be the answer.

Californians would also do well to remember that if a constitutional convention is called, they will have no say over its results. The entire matter will be out of their hands, and they will essentially be at the mercy of the convention delegates. It is not a path to be taken lightly, though Governor Schwarzenegger's proposed cuts in prison sentences, health insurance, education, and abuse shelters appear designed to instill fear in voters so that they will be more accepting of drastic measures. Are these really the spending projects that caused California to go into debt? If so, then the "governator" should terminate them. But cuts should be considered in *all* areas of state spending, not just those that will get the kind of publicity the governor desires.

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