

Budget Stand-off Ends Poorly for Low-Income People

After the longest budget stand-off in California's history, Governor Schwarzenegger signed a budget based on cuts to California's safety net services, education, and health; borrowing against future lottery projected revenue; a massive corporate tax cut; and various ways to pull revenue from future years into the budget year. A major part of the budget settlement would change the budget process to increase the size of the state's reserve, limit the use of unanticipated future revenues, and give the Governor new power to make unilateral spending cuts midway through the budget year.*

Governor "Blue Pencils" Senior Supports

Governor Schwarzenegger himself cut about \$510 million more from the budget sent to him by the legislature. Of that amount, he took nearly half from programs that serve seniors on fixed incomes. Through his line item veto authority, the Governor cut \$150 million from seniors' rental tax assistance; \$41 million from the tax rebate program for low-income seniors who own their homes; more than \$11 million from Adult Protective Services—the program that investigates allegations of abuse against frail elderly. He also cut the program that investigates abuse in nursing homes, senior legal and employment services and took away the state's share of the

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) cost of living increase.

Even before these cuts were made we heard testimony from seniors in Butte County of the impact that any losses would have on those with fixed incomes or who were dependent on savings being eroded in the current economy.

Health Cuts Affect Children and the Uninsured

A projected 250,000 children will lose health care coverage in the coming years as a result of budget reporting provisions. Children's dental services will be more limited and Healthy Families co-payments made by low-income families will be increased.

The budget eliminates money from the California Discount Prescription Drug Program which would provide discount drug cards to Californians who are without coverage. This program was created in 2006 but has not yet been funded. Aids/HIV Prevention and Education Programs were cut as well as Childhood Lead Poisoning Programs promoted through county public health departments. Medi-Cal service providers, including clinics, will see reductions that will affect consumers' ability to get timely service.

After the state Senate's rejection of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's ambitious plan to "fix our broken health care system," advocates for affordable

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JERICO's November 2008 Ballot Measure Summaries and Considerations is on our website and can be accessed from the home page at www.jerichoca.org. (Those on our email list were notified as soon as it was posted.) JERICO does not take positions on the ballot measures but we provide useful considerations as you make up your mind. We have also included links to other websites that may be helpful. If you cannot access the information on the website and want a printed copy, please call the office at 916-441-0387 and we will send you one.

Since 1987 JERICO has engaged the interfaith community throughout California in shaping state public policy that affects individuals and families living in poverty.



Editorial

There aren't too many really good years for advocates who work on poverty issues. Most legislative and budget years are an uphill climb under the best of circumstances. Improvements in health care access, affordability, and provider accountability have come slowly and through the combined efforts of many organizations and their members. Protections for working families, persons with disabilities, and older Californians come incrementally after a lot of hard work at the state Capitol and in the districts. Expanding affordable housing, mental health services, and justice for immigrants takes ongoing effort. When we can't make progress we generally can hold off the worst that is proposed.

When the Governor's budget was

unveiled in January, a large and diverse coalition formed in response to a budget that would undermine schools, health care, social services, parks, among other concerns. We worked together beyond our individual interests on behalf of a budget that would work for all Californians

And despite all the work from so many groups around the state, this year was one of the worst years for low-income people in California. Not only were the legislative cuts severe and made on top of several years of shrinkage, but the corporate "give-aways" that were included in the budget will result in declining services for years to come. The Governor's "blue pencil" cuts were an especially egregious assault on low-income seniors. And by

the time you read this, the budget may be again revised with more harm for those least able to withstand it.

So where do we go from here? It's not quite clear yet. Both political parties signed off on a budget that has severe consequences for young and old. Advocates' emotions range from fatigue to depression and anger. And as I write this I know that January is right around the corner and we start all over again.

It will make it easier to begin again with renewed energy if you will help. We need more work in the districts, more visibility at the Capitol, more JERICHO VOICES to speak from a faith perspective for those who have little or no voice. We need to hold both political parties accountable for protecting the least among us. Can we count on you?

Small Gains in a Hard Year

Although it seems at this point that there were more losses than gains this year, some of our bills were passed, signed, and chaptered as law. For those who will benefit by the laws, they are important.

- Victims of domestic violence who must break their lease to escape their abuser are protected from the remainder of the lease after giving specific notice. (AB 2052—Lieu)
- A parent who is incarcerated and "under the clock" to complete counseling or treatment services within a specific period of time to avoid losing custody of his or her children will not be penalized when those services are not available in the corrections facility. (AB 2070—Bass)
- Children can be certified for the school breakfast and lunch programs through the Department of Education as well as other entry points. (AB 2300—Laird)

- Victims during disasters are assured of receiving emergency services without requiring information or documents that are not strictly necessary to determine eligibility under state or federal law. This bill corrects the fact that in some cases people suspected of being undocumented were asked for immigration papers in order to receive basic help. (AB 2327—Caballero)
- This technical bill extends family reunification services for parents of very young children who are currently in foster care. (AB 2341—Maze)

Bills that had significant dollars attached did not fare well this year. Others were halted by the Governor as part of his record number of vetoes. Many will be re-introduced in some form in the next session.

JERICHO Newsletter is published quarterly for members of JERICHO's two organizations.

JERICHO Education for Justice educates faith communities and others about California public policy as it affects poor people.

JERICHO A Voice for Justice through its registered lobbyist in Sacramento and statewide members actively engages in the development of legislation that promotes economic fairness.

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Campaign for Paid Sick Days Will Continue

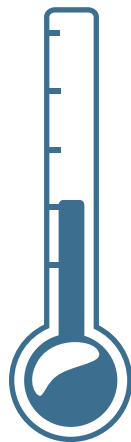
Nancy Oliver (not her real name) works for a fast food chain in order to support herself and her two children. She is one of nearly 6 million California workers who do not have paid sick days and are forced to choose between a paycheck and caring for their own health and/or that of a sick family member.

In 2006, San Francisco became the first city in the entire country to provide a minimum number of paid sick days for all workers—for their own illness and/or to care for an ill family member. This past year Assemblywoman Fiona Ma (D-San Francisco) introduced the California Paid Sick Days bill (AB 2716) that would have made California the first state in the nation to guarantee a minimum number of paid sick days for all workers to take care of themselves or sick family members. It ended the legislative year stuck in the Assembly Appropriations Committee and will be reintroduced in the next legislative session.

AB 2716 would have provided that an employee who works in California for 7 or more days in a calendar year is entitled to earn no less than one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked. In the bill an employee would be entitled to use accrued sick days beginning on the 90th calendar day of employment. The bill would require employers to provide paid sick days, upon the request of the employee, for diagnosis, care, or treatment of health conditions of the employee or an employee's family member, or for leave related to domestic violence or sexual assault. An employer would be prohibited from discriminating or retaliating against an employee who requests paid sick days.

Nearly every worker in the State of California will at some time during the year need some time off from work to take care of his or her own health or the health of family members. Low-

income workers are significantly less likely to have paid sick time than other workers. Providing workers time off to attend to their own health care and the health care of family members will ensure a healthier and more productive workforce in California—and in many cases will reduce the likelihood of spreading illness at their place of work. Workers whose jobs involve significant contact with the public, such as service workers and restaurant workers, are very unlikely to have paid sick days. Often, these workers have no choice but to come to work when they are ill, thereby spreading illness to coworkers and customers.



**Nearly 6 million—
over 40% of all
California workers
have ZERO paid
sick days to care
for themselves or
their families.**

Paid sick days will allow parents to provide personal care for their sick children rather than being forced to rely on poor alternatives such as leaving a child at home alone or sending sick children to school who should not be there. Early intervention in minor illnesses shortens their duration and gets children back in school more quickly.

Three in four (73 percent) California voters are in favor of a law allowing all workers to earn paid sick days, according to a statewide survey released on August 5, 2008 conducted by the Field Research Corporation for the California

Center for Research on Women and Families (CCRWF). Support for such a law crosses party lines and includes 85 percent of Democrats, 75 percent of non-partisans and 56 percent of Republicans.

JERICHO is joining others for whom paid sick days will be a top legislative priority in the coming year.

More JERICHO VOICES Needed To Expand Advocacy at the Capitol and in Legislative Districts

Over the years JERICHO members have extended the work of staff by attending and/or participating in legislative activities in Sacramento. These volunteers have done research, taken part in legislative committee hearings and visits to legislators at the Capitol. Other volunteers have made visits or calls to the district offices.

This year we are formalizing these activities under the name JERICHO VOICES. We will have opportunities for training and support for those in the Sacramento area who can make a commitment of 3-5 hours a month to follow an issue or a particular legislative committee. For those outside the Sacramento area we will offer materials and e-mail support to volunteers who will either follow a particular issue or be "on call" when we need someone to help for a district visit.

Please consider being a JERICHO VOICE for those at the economic margins of our state. It's an opportunity to learn and make a difference at the same time.

For more information or to sign up, e-mail the office at jericho@jerichoca.org or call us at 916-441-0387.



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Are You On Our E-mail Alert List?

At key times during the legislative sessions we send an Alert indicating an activity (phone call, letter, e-mail, visit) that can help make a difference in the state budget or a piece of legislation. We are selective about the number of Alerts and, generally, no more than 6 will come to you during the year.

Please consider adding your e-mail address to our list if we do not have it. Many of our long time members may not have included their e-mail when they first signed up. A benefit this year for those who were on the list was immediate notification when our ballot measure summary was posted on the website.

To add your e-mail address, just e-mail us at jericho@jerichoca.org and let us know to include you.

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health care moved ahead with a number of bills taken from the larger package in an effort to salvage something from the tremendous work of the past few years. The veto of these bills—together with Senator Sheila Kuehl's "single payer" bill (SB 840)—only added to the health care losses. Californians, denied coverage by insurers, will continue to sit uninsured and uninsurable, on a waiting list for the state's "high risk" pool. Insurers can continue to retroactively cancel consumers' coverage without review. A bill to limit insurers' spending on administration and profit, rather than on health services, was vetoed.

Significant human services vetoes include \$70 million to CalWORKS Eligibility and Employment Services, a cut to delay implementation of the Work

Incentive Nutritional Supplement as well as cuts to child care for CalWORKS families.

At the same time as we are digesting the "on the ground" effects of these cuts we are also preparing for the coming year which promises to be no better.

* For details on the 2008-09 Budget see *Governor Signs 2008-09 Budget: Plan Includes Deep Spending Cuts, Massive Future Tax Breaks, Debt, and Budget Process Changes* by the California Budget Project at www.cbp.org. For details specific to health budget cuts and legislation see Health Access summaries at health-access.org.

