



CALIFORNIA BUDGET PROJECT

# Dollars and Democracy:

## A Guide to the State Budget Process

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THE CALIFORNIA BUDGET PROJECT  
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# Acknowledgments


- Scott Graves prepared this guide.

## California Budget Project

- The CBP was established in 1995 to provide Californians with a source of timely, objective, and accessible expertise on state fiscal and economic policy issues. The CBP engages in independent fiscal and policy analysis and public education with the goal of improving the economic and social well-being of low- and middle-income Californians. Support for the CBP comes from foundation grants, subscriptions, and individual contributions. Please visit the CBP's website at [www.cbp.org](http://www.cbp.org).

# Contents

■ Key Facts About California's State Budget	3
■ Terms and Definitions	12
■ The Constitutional Framework	16
■ What Do the Governor and the Legislature Do?	31
■ What Happens When?	34
■ Key Takeaways	40
■ State Budget Resources	43



# Key Facts About California's State Budget

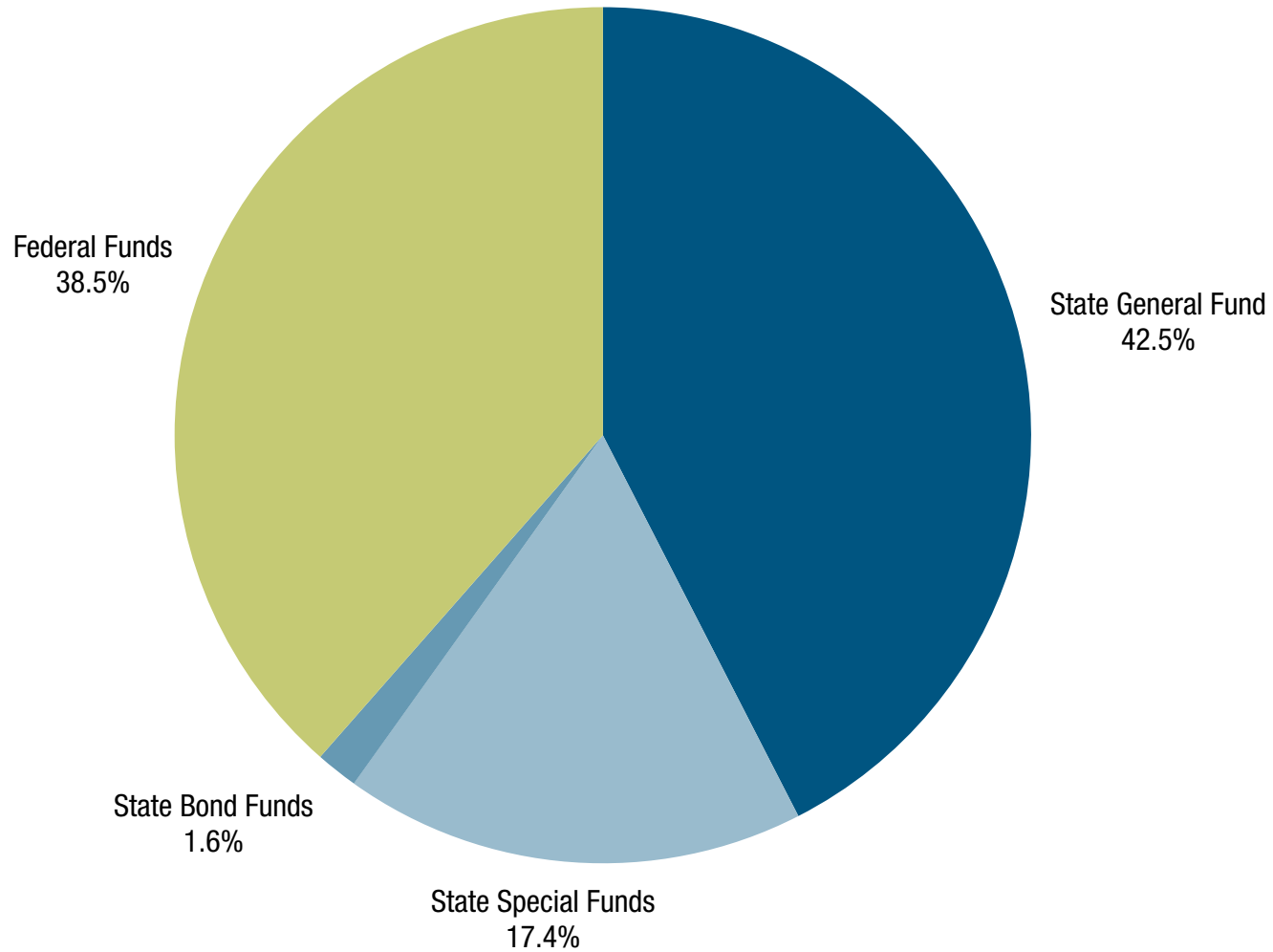
# The State Budget Is More Than Dollars and Cents

- The state budget provides a framework and funding for public services and systems. Dollars provided through the budget can help move policy ideas from concept to reality.
- But the state budget is about more than dollars and cents. At a fundamental level, the budget expresses our values and priorities as a state.
- State budget choices affect all Californians – from the quality of our schools and highways, to the cost of a college education, to working families' access to affordable child care and health care.

# The State Budget = State Funds + Federal Funds

- The state budget is composed of three kinds of state funds – the General Fund, special funds, and bond funds – along with federal funds. State dollars account for slightly more than 60 percent of California’s enacted 2014-15 state budget, which totals \$254.4 billion.
- The **state General Fund** accounts for revenues that are not designated by law for a specific purpose. Most state support for education, health and human services, and the state prison system comes from the General Fund.
- Over 500 **state special funds** account for taxes, licenses, and fees that are designated by law for a specific purpose.
- **State bond funds** account for the receipt and disbursement of general obligation (GO) bond proceeds.

## State Dollars Account for Slightly More Than 60 Percent of California's State Budget



Enacted 2014-15 Expenditures = \$254.4 Billion

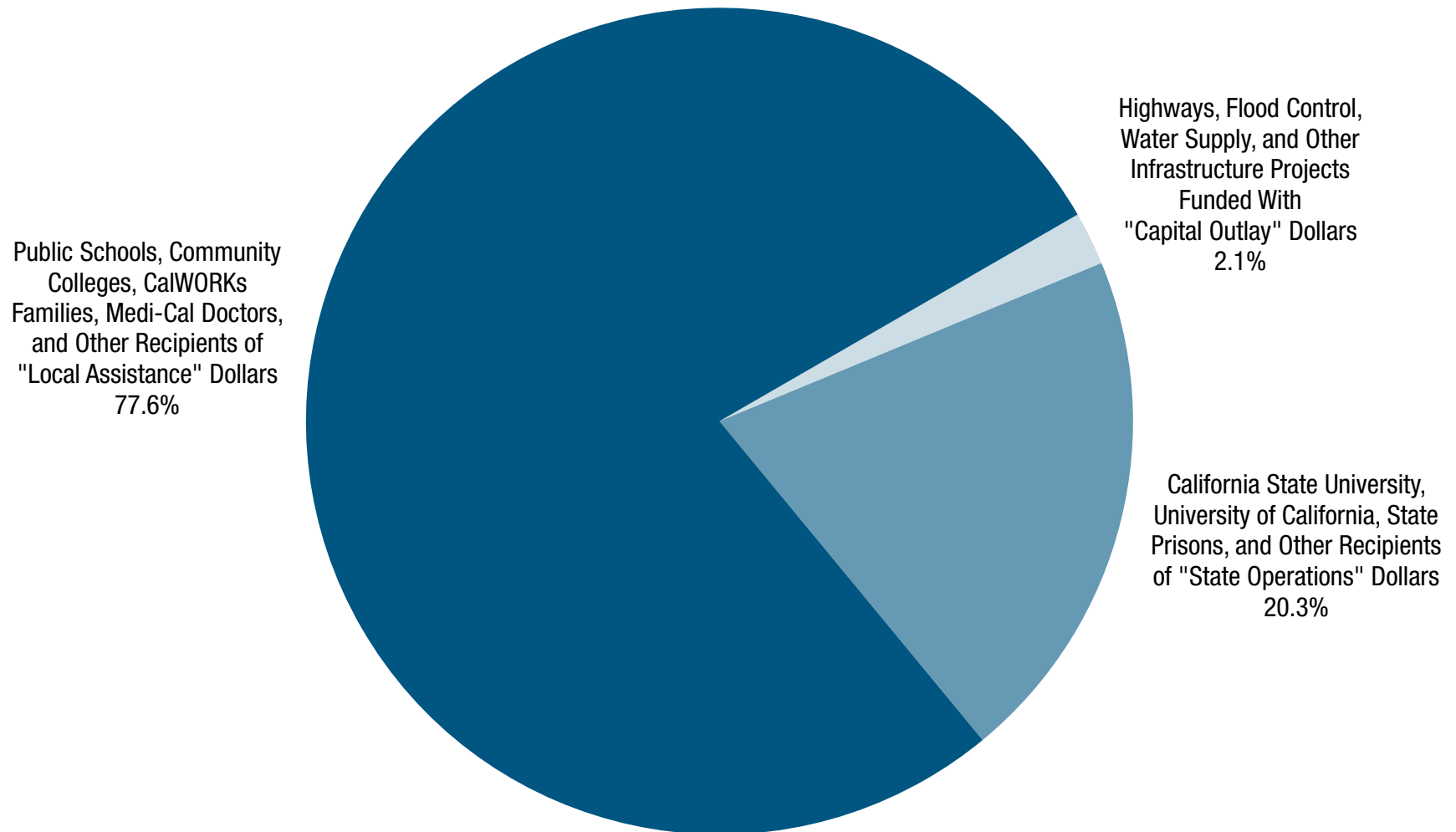
# The State Budget Is a Local Budget

- Dollars spent through the state budget go to individuals, communities, and institutions across California. Under the enacted 2014-15 state budget:
  - More than **three-quarters** of total spending will flow as “**local assistance**” to public schools, community colleges, low-income families enrolled in CalWORKs, and others.
  - **One-fifth** of total spending will go to 23 CSU campuses, 10 UC campuses, 34 state prisons, and other recipients of “**state operations**” dollars.
  - The remaining **2 percent** of total spending will flow as “**capital outlay**” dollars, supporting infrastructure projects across California. (Local assistance and state operations dollars also fund infrastructure projects.)



## The State Budget Directs Dollars to Local Communities Through Three Funding Categories

Enacted 2014-15 Spending, Including Both State and Federal Dollars



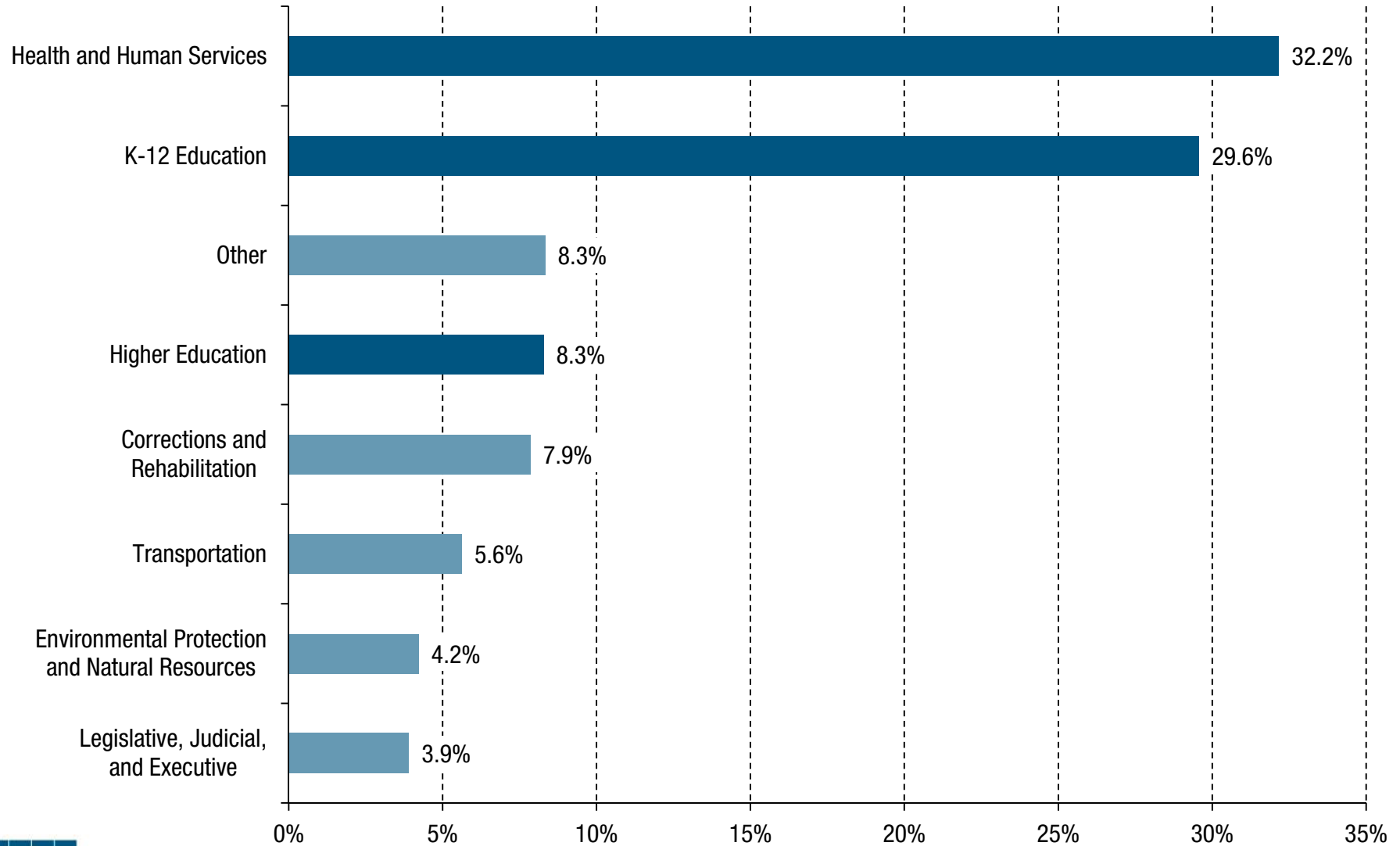
# The State Budget Supports an Array of Public Services

- State spending supports a wide range of public services and systems. Under the enacted 2014-15 state budget:
  - More than two-thirds of General Fund and special fund dollars will support health and human services (32 percent), K-12 education (30 percent), or higher education (8 percent).
  - Nearly 8 percent of General Fund and special fund dollars will support corrections and rehabilitation.
  - The balance of these dollars will support other essential services (such as transportation and environmental protection) and institutions (such as the state's court system).



## More Than Two-Thirds of State Spending Supports Education or Health and Human Services

Enacted 2014-15 General Fund and Special Fund Spending = \$152.3 Billion



# The State Budget Is a Bill of a Different Kind

- Bills change state law, such as by creating programs, modifying eligibility for services, or raising or lowering taxes. Most bills move through the Legislature's policy committee process.
- The state budget is a bill. However, unlike other bills, the "budget bill":
  - Provides authority to spend money across an array of public systems and services for a single year.
  - Moves through budget committees – rather than policy committees – on a distinct timeline.
  - Moves with other bills that are needed to implement the policies assumed in the budget.



# The State Budget Process: Terms and Definitions

# Speaking the Language

- **Governor's Proposed Budget:**

- Shows spending for the prior and current fiscal years and the proposed spending for the upcoming fiscal year.

- **Governor's Budget Summary:**

- Provides the Governor's economic and revenue outlook, highlights major policy initiatives, and summarizes state expenditures assumed in the proposed budget.

- **May Revision:**

- Updates the Governor's economic and revenue outlook and revises, supplements, or withdraws the policy initiatives included in the Governor's proposed budget.

# Speaking the Language (continued)

## ■ **Budget Bill:**

- Itemizes appropriations, which authorize agencies to spend money from a specific fund for a specific purpose.

## ■ **Budget-Related Bills:**

- Generally make statutory changes related to the budget bill.
- Generally move in tandem with the budget bill (“trailer bills”).
- Can move independently of the budget bill, generally through the Legislature’s policy committee process.

## ■ **Veto:**

- The Governor’s constitutional authority to reject a bill or reduce or eliminate items of appropriation.

# Speaking the Language (continued)

- **Department of Finance (DOF):**
  - Prepares the Governor's budget documents. The DOF director is the Governor's chief fiscal adviser.
- **Assembly Budget Committee and Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee:**
  - Review the Governor's proposals and help develop the Legislature's version of the budget. Committee analyses are released beginning in January.
- **Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO):**
  - Provides fiscal and policy advice to the Legislature. LAO budget analyses are released beginning in January.





# The State Budget Process: The Constitutional Framework

# The State Constitution Establishes the Rules of the Budget Process

- The Governor and legislators craft the state's annual spending plan according to rules outlined in the state Constitution.
- The rules that govern the budget process are not static. California voters periodically revise them by approving constitutional amendments that appear on the statewide ballot.
- Proposals to amend the budget process can be placed on the ballot through a citizens' initiative or by the Legislature. A constitutional amendment takes effect if approved by a simple majority of voters.

# Key Deadlines: January 10 and June 15

- **The Governor must propose a budget for the upcoming fiscal year on or before January 10.**
  - The budget must be balanced: Estimated revenues (as determined by the Governor) must meet or exceed the Governor's proposed spending.
- **The Legislature must pass a budget bill for the upcoming fiscal year by midnight on June 15.**
  - The budget bill must be balanced: Estimated General Fund revenues (as determined by the Legislature) must meet or exceed General Fund spending.

# Budget Bill and Trailer Bills: Simple Majority Vote

- **The budget bill and trailer bills may be passed by a simple majority vote of each house of the Legislature.**
  - Proposition 25 of 2010 allows the Legislature to pass – by a simple majority vote – both the budget bill and trailer bills that take effect as soon as the Governor signs them.
  - Proposition 25 trailer bills must be listed in the budget bill and must contain an appropriation of any amount, but may not contain a tax increase.
  - Prior to Proposition 25, a two-thirds vote of each house was required to pass the budget bill and any trailer bills that were intended to take effect immediately.

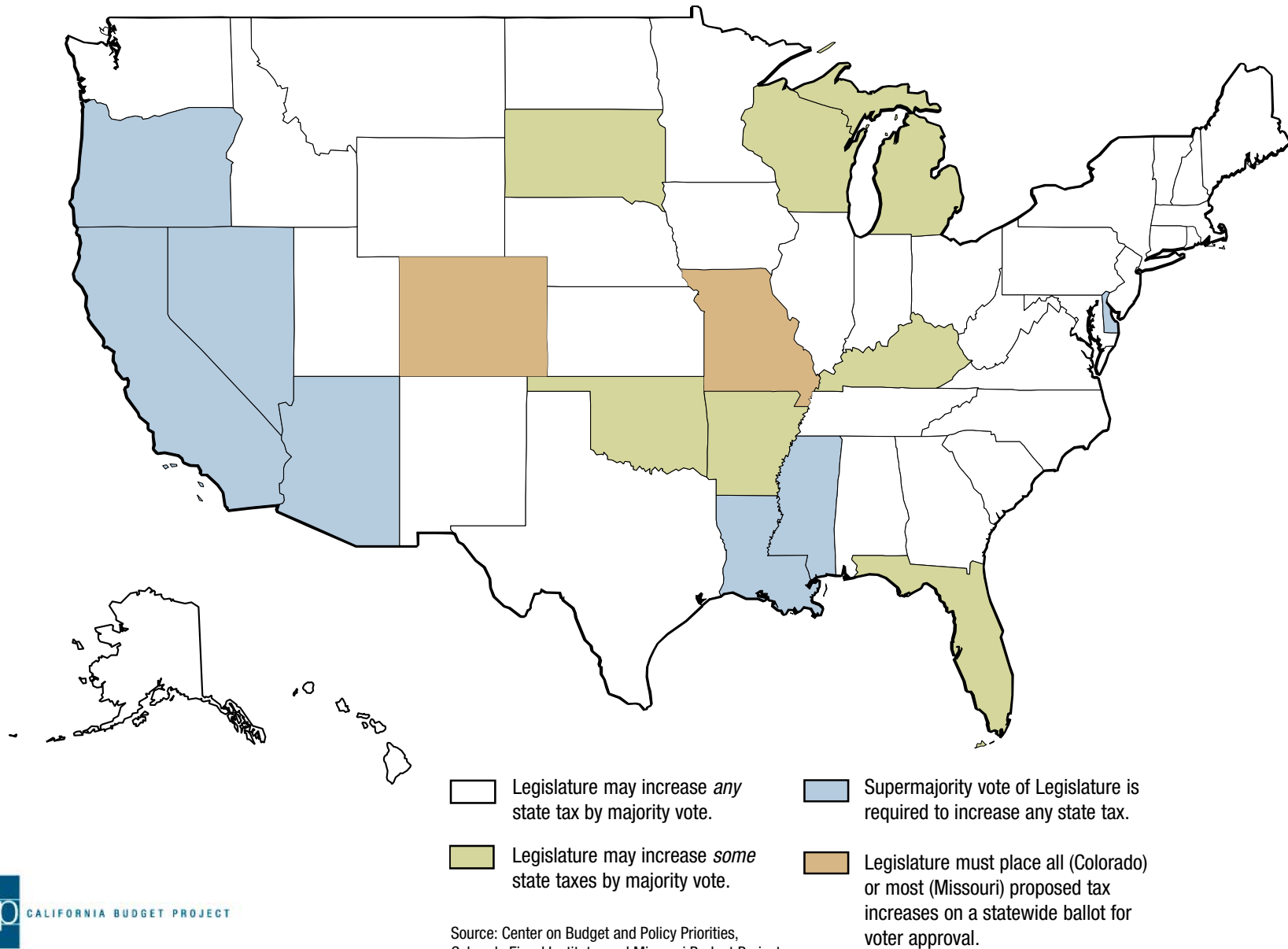
# Penalties for a Late Budget

- **Lawmakers face penalties if they fail to pass the budget bill on or before June 15.**
  - Proposition 25 requires lawmakers to permanently forfeit both their pay and their reimbursement for travel and living expenses for each day after June 15 that the budget bill is not passed and sent to the Governor.
  - These penalties do not apply to budget trailer bills, which do not have to be passed on or before June 15.

# Tax Increases: Supermajority Vote

- **Any tax increase requires a two-thirds vote of each house.**
  - Under the state Constitution, “any change in state statute which results in **any** taxpayer paying a higher tax” requires a two-thirds vote of each house of the Legislature.
  - This standard was imposed by Proposition 26 of 2010, which expanded the definition of a tax increase and thus the scope of the two-thirds vote requirement.
  - Prior to Proposition 26, only bills changing state taxes “for the purpose of increasing revenues” required a two-thirds vote (a standard established by Proposition 13 of 1978). Bills that increased some taxes but reduced others by an equal or larger amount could be passed by a majority vote.

## California Is One of Just Seven States to Require a Supermajority Vote of the Legislature for Any State Tax Increase



# Tax Increases: Supermajority Vote (continued)

- **Proposition 26 of 2010 broadened the definition of a tax to include some charges previously considered “fees.”**
  - Prior to Proposition 26, the Legislature could create or increase fees by majority vote. These included regulatory fees intended to address health, environmental, or other problems caused by various products, such as alcohol, oil, or hazardous materials.
  - Proposition 26 reclassified regulatory and certain other fees as taxes. As a result, a two-thirds vote of each house of the Legislature is now required for many charges that previously were considered fees and could be passed by majority vote.



# Additional Supermajority Vote Requirements

- **The state Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of each house of the Legislature in order to:**
  - Appropriate money from the General Fund, *except for* appropriations that are for public schools or that are included in the budget bill or in Proposition 25 trailer bills.
  - Pass bills that take effect immediately (urgency statutes), *except for* the budget bill and Proposition 25 trailer bills.
  - Place constitutional amendments or general obligation (GO) bond measures before the voters.
  - Override the Governor's veto of a bill or an appropriation.

# Proposition 98: A Funding Guarantee for K-14 Education

- **Proposition 98 of 1988 guarantees a minimum level of funding for K-12 schools and community colleges.**
  - The amount of the guarantee is calculated each year using one of three tests that apply under varying fiscal and economic conditions. Funding for the guarantee comes from the state General Fund and local property tax revenues.
  - The Legislature can suspend the guarantee for a single year by a two-thirds vote of each house and provide less funding. Following a suspension, the state must increase Proposition 98 funding over time to the level that it would have reached absent the suspension.
  - While the Legislature can provide more than the Proposition 98 guarantee, it often serves as a maximum funding level.

## Proposition 2: Debt Repayment, Saving for a Rainy Day

- **Proposition 2 of 2014 requires the state to pay down debt and applies new rules to the Budget Stabilization Account (BSA), a rainy day fund created by California voters in 2004.**
  - The state must set aside 1.5 percent of General Fund revenues each year, plus additional dollars in years when tax revenues from capital gains are particularly strong.
  - Until 2029-30, half of the revenues go into the BSA and the other half *must* be used to pay down state budgetary debt, which includes unfunded pension liabilities. Starting in 2030-31, the entire annual transfer goes into the BSA.
  - State policymakers may suspend or reduce the annual BSA deposit and withdraw funds from the reserve, but only under limited circumstances that qualify as a “budget emergency.”

# Proposition 2: A Budget Reserve for K-14 Education

- **Proposition 2 of 2014 also creates a state budget reserve for K-12 schools and community colleges called the Public School System Stabilization Account (PSSSA).**
  - Deposits come from state capital gains tax revenues in years when those revenues are particularly strong.
  - However, various conditions must be met before these dollars could be transferred to the PSSSA. For example, transfers could occur only in so-called “Test 1” years under Proposition 98, which have been rare.
  - Because of these conditions, the state is unlikely to set aside revenues in the PSSSA.

# State Mandates: Pay for Them or Suspend Them

- **The state is required to pay for or suspend mandates that it imposes on local governments.**
  - Proposition 4 of 1979 requires the state to reimburse local governments for costs related to a new program or a higher level of service that is mandated by the state.
  - Proposition 1A of 2004 expanded the definition of a mandate to include the transfer of financial responsibility from the state to local governments.
  - Proposition 1A also requires the state to suspend a mandate in any year in which local governments' costs are not fully reimbursed.

# State Appropriations Limit (SAL): A Cap on Spending

- **Appropriations are subject to a limit established by Proposition 4 of 1979, as modified by later initiatives.**
  - The SAL limits the amount of state tax proceeds that can be appropriated each year. This limit is adjusted annually for changes in population and in the cost of living.
  - Some appropriations from tax proceeds do not count toward the limit, including debt service and spending that is needed to comply with court or federal mandates.
  - Revenues that exceed the SAL over a two-year period (“excess” revenues) are divided equally between Proposition 98 spending and taxpayer rebates. The state last exceeded the SAL in 1999-00 (but did not do so in the prior year).

# Fiscal Emergencies: Addressing Midyear Budget Gaps

- **The Governor may declare a fiscal emergency and call the Legislature into special session to address it.**
  - Proposition 58 of 2004 allows the Governor to declare a fiscal emergency if the state faces a “substantial” budget gap during a fiscal year. The Governor must then call the Legislature into special session and propose legislation to address the problem.
  - The Legislature must send the Governor one or more bills to address the fiscal emergency. If lawmakers fail to do so within 45 days, then they may not recess or act on any other bills until they do. Lawmakers do not have to pass the Governor’s proposal; they may approve an alternative that addresses the emergency.



# The State Budget Process: What Do the Governor and the Legislature Do?



# The Governor Has the Lead Role in Crafting the Budget

## ■ The Governor:

- Approves, modifies, or rejects spending proposals prepared by state departments and agencies through an internal process coordinated by the DOF.
- Proposes a spending plan for the state each January, which is introduced as the budget bill in the Legislature.
- Updates and revises the proposed budget each May.
- Signs or vetoes the bills included in the budget package, including both the budget bill and budget-related bills.
- Can veto all or part of individual appropriations (line items), but cannot increase appropriations above the level approved by the Legislature.

# Lawmakers Review and Revise the Governor's Plan

## ■ The Legislature:

- Approves, modifies, or rejects the Governor's proposals.
- Can add new spending or make other changes that substantially revise the budget as proposed by the Governor.
- Adopts “budget control language” to restrict the use of funds allocated through the budget.
- Needs a simple majority vote of each house to pass the budget bill and Proposition 25 trailer bills.
- Needs a two-thirds vote to pass certain other bills that may be part of the budget package, such as bills that raise taxes or propose constitutional amendments.
- Needs a two-thirds vote to override the Governor's veto of a bill or an appropriation.



# The State Budget Process: What Happens When?

# The State Budget Timeline

- State budget decisions are made throughout the year, both in public settings and behind the scenes.
- **Summer to Fall:**
  - State departments and agencies develop baseline budgets to maintain existing service levels and may prepare “budget change proposals” that alter service levels in the upcoming fiscal year. The DOF reviews these documents.
  - Following a series of meetings within the Administration, the Governor makes final decisions and the DOF prepares the proposed budget for release in January.
  - Independent of the Governor, legislative leaders develop their budget priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

# The State Budget Timeline (continued)

- **By January 10:**

- The Governor releases the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

- **February to Early May:**

- Budget subcommittees hold dozens of hearings to review the Governor's proposed budget and make initial decisions.

- **Mid-May to June:**

- The Governor releases the May Revision by May 14.
- Each house of the Legislature then finalizes its version of the budget, after which a legislative conference committee may meet to resolve differences.

# The State Budget Timeline (continued)

- **June:**

- Legislative leaders and the Governor meet to address outstanding issues.

- **June 15:**

- The constitutional deadline for lawmakers to pass the budget bill. (This deadline does not apply to budget-related bills.)

- **July 1:**

- The new fiscal year begins.
- The Governor may sign the budget bill and budget-related bills – as well as issue vetoes – by this date.

# The State Budget Timeline (continued)

## ■ July and Beyond:

- The Legislature may pass – by majority vote – amendments that change the spending levels in the adopted budget bill.
- Lawmakers also may pass additional budget-related bills, thus increasing the size and scope of the original budget package.
- State departments and agencies develop baseline budgets and budget change proposals for the *following* fiscal year and submit them to the DOF, starting the state budget process anew.

# Navigating the State Budget Process

Each year the Governor and Legislature work to craft the state's spending plan. While the January-to-June period gets the most attention, the process of crafting the budget is an ongoing enterprise, giving Californians ample opportunity to stay engaged and involved year-round.

## The Governor

The Governor has the lead role in developing the state budget. Each year, the Governor proposes a spending plan, which is introduced as the budget bill in the Legislature. The Governor can sign or veto the budget bill passed by legislators as well as other bills in the budget package that make policy changes related to the budget. The Governor can also reduce or eliminate individual appropriations using the line-item veto.

## The Legislature

The Legislature – made up of the Assembly and Senate – reviews the Governor's proposed budget and crafts its own version of the spending plan. The Legislature can maintain, modify, or reject the Governor's proposals, with review occurring through each house's budget committee and related subcommittees. The Legislature must pass the budget bill, but not other bills in the budget package, by June 15. The Legislature can override a Governor's veto by a two-thirds vote of each house.

## The Public

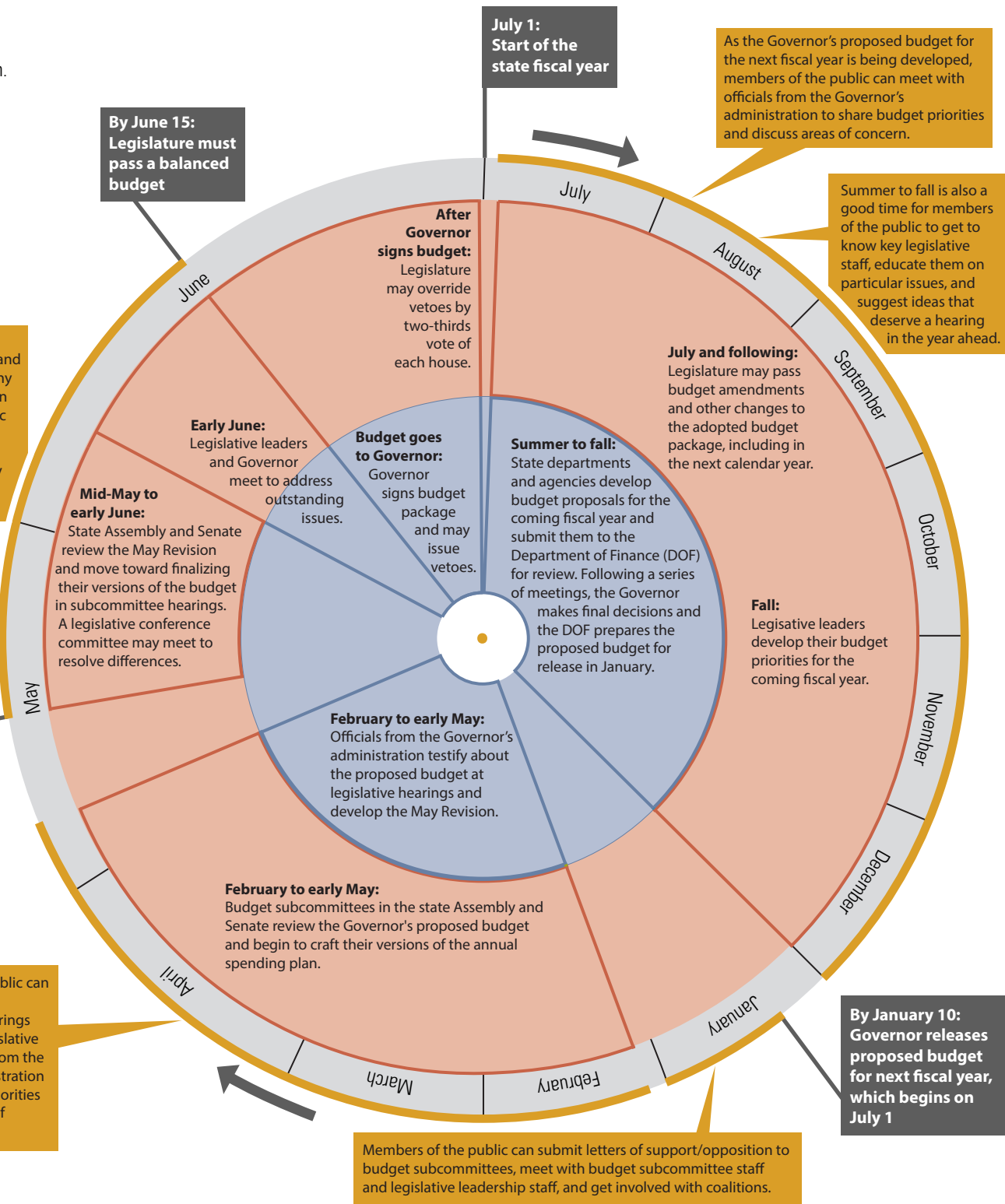
The public has various opportunities for input during the budget process. Members of the public can meet with officials from the Governor's administration and with legislators and their staffs, testify before budget committees and subcommittees, and write letters of support and opposition. Through individual engagement or as part of coalitions, members of the public can express their budget priorities and areas of concern.

Members of the public can meet with Governor's staff and legislative staff to discuss any changes or new proposals in the May Revision. The public can continue to offer comments at legislative hearings, although typically not during the two-house conference committee.

**By May 14:**  
Governor releases revised budget proposal ("May Revision")

Members of the public can testify at budget subcommittee hearings and meet with legislative staff and officials from the Governor's administration to share budget priorities and discuss areas of concern.

Members of the public can submit letters of support/opposition to budget subcommittees, meet with budget subcommittee staff and legislative leadership staff, and get involved with coalitions.







# The State Budget Process: Key Takeaways

# The Bottom Line

- **The state spending plan is about more than dollars and cents.** Crafting the state budget provides an opportunity for Californians to express our values and priorities as a state.
- **The state Constitution establishes the rules of the budget process.** Among other things, these rules allow lawmakers to approve spending with a simple majority vote, but require a two-thirds vote to increase taxes. Voters periodically revise the budget process by approving constitutional amendments.
- **The Governor has the lead role in the budget process.** Proposing a budget for the upcoming fiscal year gives the Governor the first word in each year's budget deliberations. Veto power generally gives the Governor the last word, too.

# The Bottom Line (continued)

- **The Legislature reviews and revises the Governor's proposed budget.** Lawmakers can alter the Governor's proposals and advance their own initiatives as they craft their version of the state spending plan prior to negotiating an agreement with the Governor.
- **Budget decisions are made throughout the year, both in public settings and behind the scenes.** The public has various opportunities for input during the budget process. This includes testifying at legislative hearings and meeting with officials from the Governor's administration as well as with legislators and their staffs. In short, Californians have ample opportunity to stay engaged and involved in the budget process year-round.

# State Budget Resources

- **California Budget Project:** Budget and policy analyses, a blog, and email updates ([www.cbp.org](http://www.cbp.org)).
- **Department of Finance:** The Governor's budget proposals and related documents ([www.dof.ca.gov](http://www.dof.ca.gov)).
- **Legislative Analyst's Office:** Budget and policy analyses, budget recommendations, and historical budget data ([www.lao.ca.gov](http://www.lao.ca.gov)).
- **Legislative Counsel:** Bills and bill analyses, the state codes, the state Constitution, and a free bill-tracking service ([leginfo.legislature.ca.gov](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov)).
- **State Assembly and Senate:** Committee agendas and other publications, floor session and committee schedules, the annual legislative calendar, and live audio streaming of legislative proceedings ([assembly.ca.gov](http://assembly.ca.gov) and [senate.ca.gov](http://senate.ca.gov)).
- **The California Channel:** Live and archived webcasts of legislative hearings and floor sessions ([www.calchannel.com](http://www.calchannel.com)).