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Political Jujitsu Would Reframe California's Tax Debate

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www.Calbuzz.com

Since 1912, when the first initiative appeared on the ballot in California, “no” has beaten “yes” two-thirds of the time. It is almost always more difficult to approve an initiative than it is to defeat one, which is why Gov. Jerry Brown and the California Democrats should, as a matter of political strategy, construct their ballot measure—to extend taxes and fees and prevent a doubling of the \$12 billion in cuts they have already made—so that they can campaign for a “no” vote.

We have referred to this as the Calbuzz Outside-the-Box-Thinking Plan for Fiscal Integrity, Nuclear Safety and Peace in Our Time. Here's how it would work:

www.bepress.com/cjpp

First, the Democrats would approve, by a majority vote if need be, a conditional all-cuts budget that presumes no tax extensions. Then, they would gather signatures to place that budget on the November ballot. The measure would include a provision that if the measure fails the cuts called for will not occur because the 2009 taxes and fees will be re-instated for five years.

As a practical matter, cuts approved by the legislature before the end of June can be delayed to occur until November. At the same time, those costs that are to be shifted to local government for local responsibilities can occur whether the measure wins or loses.

This would set up a situation in which Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform, Jon Fleischman of FlashReport, radio disc jockeys John Kobylt and Ken Chiampou

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of KFI AM radio in Los Angeles, the California Republican Party and the rest of the “it’s not-our-problem” cadre would be forced to argue for the budget ballot measure while Democrats and labor argue against it.

“Yes” would be the position in favor of cutting programs for widows, orphans, fish and fawn while “No” would be a vote for mom and apple pie.

Such a move would fulfill Brown’s promise for a vote on taxes while ripping the mask from the Republicans’ we’re-just-protecting-the-taxpayers mantra and forcing them to take public responsibility for the real-life consequences of what their position truly means: a massive reduction in popular public services, starting with K-12 schools and higher education

Right now the right-wing has the best of all possible worlds: they cry crocodile tears about government spending without having to lift a finger to take ownership of the painful steps necessary to reduce it enough to balance the budget exclusively with cuts.

Using political jujitsu, however, the Calbuzz Plan flips the framework on the whole debate, and denies irresponsible Republicans their current luxury of indulging in total unaccountability.

In short, framing the debate as a fight over program cuts instead of a battle over tax hikes, offers Gov. Brown and the Democrats their best chance of winning and thereby averting further debilitating program cuts.

Is it legal? Would banks and other institutions extend operating loans to California? Why not? No matter which way the vote goes in November, California would have a budget. The only question would be how deep cuts will be and whether taxes and fees passed in 2009 would be extended or allowed to expire.