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Governor Urges Legislature to Let Voters Decide

Governor Jerry Brown on January 31, 2011, delivered his first State-of-the-State address for his third term as Governor. The address was delivered to a joint session of the State Assembly and State Senate three weeks after he delivered his proposal for the 2011-12 State Budget. Typically, governors deliver the State of-the-State address before the Budget proposal is released—but Governor Brown is approaching the problems faced by California, particularly the Budget problems, in a different manner.

Brown spent much of his 14-minute speech urging the Legislature to give the people of California an opportunity to weigh on the future direction of the state, saying "it would be unconscionable" for legislators to block a special election.

"When democratic ideals and calls for the right to vote are stirring the imagination of young people in Egypt and Tunisia and other parts of the world, we in California can't say now is the time to block a vote of the people . . . (W)hen the elected representatives find themselves bogged down by deep differences which divide them, the only way forward is to go back to the people and seek their guidance. It is time for a legislative check in with the people of California."

His comments echoed the findings of a poll released by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) on January 26, 2011, which found that about two-thirds of likely voters believe that the Governor's proposal for a special election to extend the temporary taxes is a good idea and 54% would go a step further and support the plan.

The Governor's call to allow the voters of California to weigh in on the future direction of the state met with applause by Democratic legislators, which prompted Brown to quip, "I want to see a few Republicans clapping."

Brown noted that, should the temporary taxes not be extended, the Budget would have to be balanced with significant cuts to programs that are not federally protected. He included elementary, middle, and high schools as well as the University of California, the California State University system, prisons, local public safety programs and vital health programs.

By working together, Brown indicated, California could have a bright future. "When we get our Budget in balance, California will be in a strong position to take advantage of its many assets and its strategic location on the Pacific Rim . . . our state will play a leading role, as it always has, and reap unimagined benefits."

—Terry Anderson and Michelle McKay Underwood