



Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2008

## Letter: Time for change

Editor: I cannot agree more with your editorial of Dec. 26, "A part-time legislature."

As a politically active individual, I've had numerous opportunities to interact with all-stripes of state and federal legislatures across this fine country, including those in California. My experiences have given me the impression that many of our California legislators are insulated from the everyday residents of their communities.

Recently, I had the opportunity to interview numerous nurses who were serving in various state houses across this country, most serving in a part-time capacity. I was surprised by their accessibility, many providing me with their home or cell phone numbers and many gave me their personal e-mails; this experience was in stark contrast to our California legislators.

The more I spoke with these legislators the more I became impressed with their "get things done attitude." Their legislatures were as diverse as ours, and many were in the minority party but they shared the same mentality of we have a limited time in which to get our work done (usually 120 days) and there seemed to be a commitment to not let things drag on and on.

Perhaps if our legislators only had 120 days to get their work done they'd spend less time chest-thumping and grandstanding, and put aside some of the partisan bickering and get the people's work done.

I'm not sure how Californians' would react to the legislature actually passing a budget on time or closing the book on important legislation, but I for one would love to see that happen for a change.

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Friday, Dec. 26, 2008

## **Our View: A part-time legislature**

### **California lawmakers haven't lived up to expectations or achieved results.**

Not many California residents think the Legislature is doing a good job.

But that job review seems lost on the 80 Assembly members and 40 Senate members. They are arrogant, refusing to solve the budget crisis, taking junkets when they should be in Sacramento preventing a meltdown of state government.

Their behavior is unacceptable, and it's time for bold reforms of state government to go along with the redistricting reform measure passed by voters last month. The four-decade experiment of full-time lawmakers should be replaced with a part-time legislature.

The current system has been a miserable failure, with gridlock being the legacy of full-time lawmakers. They spend their time on bills such as banning dogs from sitting in drivers' laps, but ignore difficult problems.

Voters must send a strong message to lawmakers that they'll no longer will be satisfied with a system that doesn't produce results. Let's start by limiting the time legislators can do mischief and force them to deal with the budget and a handful of other important issues.

A part-time legislature with specific tasks is preferable to the current system in which they have too much time on their hands. Limit the session length -- maybe 120 days -- then lawmakers can go home and earn a living like the rest of the state taxpayers.

Legislators aren't working for us full time, so why should we go through the sham of a having a full-time legislature?

No one epitomizes this problem more than Sen. Denise Ducheny, D-San Diego, who chairs the Senate Budget Committee.

During the recent special legislative session on the budget, she went on a junket to India, and her colleagues didn't even see a problem with her absence. In fact, Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg subsequently reappointed her to head the budget committee.

Talk about out of touch with reality. They reward each other for going AWOL in a time of crisis. The Legislature has earned part-time status.

Most states have part-time legislatures. California and nine other states -- mostly bigger ones -- have legislatures that are essentially full time, with compensation and staff to go along with it.

We believe redistricting reform will result in California lawmakers being more accountable to the public by making elections more competitive. But Proposition 11 won't be fully implemented until the 2012 elections. Reforming a state government desperately out of control can't wait.

We believe the electorate in California is frustrated enough with the behavior of lawmakers that going to a part-time legislature would be embraced at the ballot box. A productive part-time system would be an improvement over a do-nothing full-time system.