

"As bitter as the words are in my mouth, we face additional cuts...But I am drawing this line. Because our future economic well-being is so dependent upon education, I will protect education funding in this budget. And we can no longer afford to cut higher education either."

-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger,
State of the State Address, January 6, 2010

Two days later Mr. Schwarzenegger released his proposed 2010-11 budget that includes *at least* \$1.8 billion in direct cuts to K-12 schools. Did he raise our expectations just so that his actual announcement would hurt that much more?

No wonder a new poll puts his popularity at 27%.

The Governor's proposals:

1. Fully "fund" a negative cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) at -0.38%

The negative COLA proposal will amount to about \$250 per student, which is equal to the so-called "one time" cut of \$252.83 per pupil that school districts endured last year.

2. Cut "school district central administration" by \$1.2 billion

This "chop from the top" proposal doesn't specify cutting outrageous superintendent salaries -- only a reduction in funds for central offices.

3. \$300 million reduction by eliminating barriers to "contracting out"

In other words, the Governor wants to make it easier for school districts to bypass unionized employees (and their pesky collective bargaining agreements) by contracting services from outside providers.

4. Accounting tricks to lower future Prop. 98 minimum funding guarantees

Schwarzenegger proposes to eliminate the state's gas tax in favor of a "fee", causing gasoline sales revenue to bypass the general fund altogether.

5. Additional "flexibilities" inspired by Race-to-the-Top

The Governor's budget proposes to eliminate seniority in lay-offs, transfers and rehires; eliminate laid-off teachers' first priority for substitute assignments and reduce the school year by up to five days. Simply put, seniority rights

protect older employees from being targeted due to union activity or earning higher pay.

These proposals make clear that any attempt to "ride out" the storm just won't work. Not only is this strategy insulting to teachers facing lay-offs right now and students losing out on an education, but California is getting ready to permanently dismantle fundamental rights of teachers.

It is worth mentioning quickly that the bulk of Mr. Schwarzenegger's cuts this time around target health and human services. As our kids' lives neither begin nor end at the classroom door, the loss of quality welfare programs in California will hurt children just the same as laying off school employees.

Last year's federal stimulus offset some of the education cuts in California. We deserve a lot more help, like the kind of money that's been thrown at Wall St. and the Iraq/Afghan wars. Both of California's senators are ranking Democrats and the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi hails from San Francisco. Political pundits think California has zero chance of netting any federal funds (Mr. Schwarzenegger is relying on at least \$6.8 billion) which is absolutely ridiculous. Whatever cuts occur this year, there will be plenty of blame to go around politicians of both parties.

Proposition 13 also needs to be repealed. It requires a 2/3rds vote to raise taxes but only a simple majority to reduce them. It requires a 2/3rds vote to accept a budget, allowing the Republican minority to hold us hostage and the Democratic majority to conveniently blame them and sidestep the issue of seriously raising taxes on the wealthy.

Why eliminate school days when we could eliminate Proposition 13? Why pull funding from school districts when we should pull out of Afghanistan? Why raise up a broken generation of children when we could just raise taxes on the wealthy?

This is obviously a tall order so here's a place to start: The March 4 Statewide Day of Action to Defend Public Education. Initiated by student activists, and now supported by both the California Federation of Teachers and the California Teachers Association, this could become the biggest day of resistance we've seen so far.

Now's the perfect time to ask our local unions to endorse March 4 and to setup organizing committees to turn out educators, parents and students for protest and discussion.

"A war budget leaves every child behind."