

The Terminator's Curveball to California's Counties

Part 3: "Surgical cuts" gone terribly wrong

In the May Revise Budget Proposal, Governor Schwarzenegger dropped his latest bombshell in the never-ending battle over balancing the state budget. This is the third in a series that sheds light on the impacts to Alameda County residents.

What does it mean to be "surgical" when it comes to fiscal management? President Obama used the term to describe the speedy, precise process that was intended to lead GM through bankruptcy in record time. In tough economic times, legislators should balance budgets by "surgically," cutting out duplicative or unproven programs.

In Governor Schwarzenegger's world, "surgical" means something entirely different. When the Terminator goes in, it's with a cleaver as he bluntly gouges the poor and needy. There is often no rhyme or reason as to where the knife lands. In his recent May Revise Budget Proposal, the Governor arbitrarily plans to cut programs that help California's neediest residents. Many of his proposals would lead to higher unemployment and a loss of economic investment in local communities. Schwarzenegger is no highly trained surgeon—with every slip of the knife, he is bleeding California dry.

Let's take a closer look at a few of the Governor's "surgical" cuts.

Cuts to the California AIDS Drug Assistance Program

The California AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) subsidizes the purchase of costly AIDS drugs for those who cannot afford them. In the Governor's January Budget proposal, this subsidy was cut for inmates in county jails, but remained intact for inmates in state prisons. According to the Alameda County Sheriff's office, the Sheriff would be forced to pick up the cost of providing these services for 250 inmates to the tune of approximately \$500,000 per year. This arbitrary, nonsensical scheme simply unloads the responsibility for the ADAP program on overburdened county governments. As a longtime advocate for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated citizens, I find it disturbing that the Governor would sacrifice prisoner health to save the bottom line.

Cuts to Subsidized Childcare

The Governor's proposal eliminates funding for the CalWORKs Child Care program and all state supported childcare programs, with the exception of pre-school and after-school programs. Across the state, that would mean 142,000 children would have no place to go when their parents are at work. According to the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education, the cuts would also lead to an estimated loss of 38,000 full-time equivalent childcare provider jobs and a loss of approximately \$3.1 billion in economic output in California. The number of childcare jobs is probably even higher than 38,000 considering that many childcare providers work part-time. Along with the proposed elimination of the CalWORKs Welfare to Work program, the loss of childcare robs thousands of Californians of a vital service. Childcare subsidies assist not only the state's neediest residents of the resources to lift themselves out of poverty; students and working professionals also depend upon the services on a daily basis. Common sense tells us that if a parent can't find affordable childcare, she or he will have trouble going to school, seeking employment or holding down a job. Why would the Governor gut programs that allow Californians to make a living and contribute to society?

Cuts to Immigrant Programs

Governor Schwarzenegger's May Revise also attacks legal immigrants, some of whom have come to America from war-torn countries to seek asylum. The Terminator plans to eliminate the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) and the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP), a program for non-citizens who are ineligible for federal food stamp aid. According to the Alameda County Social Services Agency, there are approximately 1,000 individuals who receive CAPI benefits in the County. If the CAPI program is eliminated, the majority of these individuals will become eligible for General Assistance (GA) benefits. The addition of CAPI recipients to the GA program, which is almost 100% funded by the County, would result in a \$4 million increase in GA grant costs. As I mentioned in my first Op-Ed, the County has already taken actions to limit GA benefits to 3 months for a 12 month period for those deemed employable. This was a move I opposed. Adding more GA clients will only burden a program that is already in fiscal emergency. For non-citizens who struggle with the language barrier and cultural differences, the loss of these support services will make it even more difficult for them to find employment and establish themselves as tax-paying residents.

Reductions in Women's Health Programs

The classic Terminator "surgical cuts" attack programs that both save the state money and attract hefty federal matching funds. The California Family PACT (Planning, Access, Care and Treatment) is one such program. This family planning program, which the Governor has targeted for possible elimination in the 2010-11 budget, has saved the state more than \$4 billion since 1997. In other words, for every dollar invested in the PACT program, the state saves \$9.25 in medical costs related to unintended pregnancies. These figures come from a recent analysis by the Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health at the University of California San Francisco. Family PACT is also extremely successful in attracting federal matching funds. According to the Bixby Center report, for every dollar the state spends on family planning programs, Washington sends \$9 in matching funds to California.

Why would the Governor slash programs that clearly save the state money, bring in federal dollars and provide crucial services to needy residents? By targeting programs that serve the most vulnerable Californians, the Governor's cuts will significantly impact the County's ability to serve our residents. We are the ones who have to look these people in the eye and tell them there's no more money. With proposals like these, we are left to scratch our heads and plan for worst case scenarios. As the Terminator performs his usual botched "surgical" procedure, the State Legislature and county governments are left to clean up the mess.

In the next segment, learn about which programs and special interests the Governor is protecting as he dismantles California's safety net.

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