

*Leaders seek to root out waste; NEW EFFORT SEEKS TO SUCCEED WHERE BUREAUCRATS FAILED Sacramento Bee (California) December 14, 2008 Sunday*

Copyright 2008 McClatchy Newspapers, Inc.  
All Rights Reserved  
Sacramento Bee (California)

**December 14, 2008 Sunday**  
**METRO FINAL EDITION**

SECTION: MAIN NEWS; Pg. A3

LENGTH: 1034 words

HEADLINE: Leaders seek to root out waste;  
NEW EFFORT SEEKS TO SUCCEED WHERE BUREAUCRATS FAILED

BYLINE: Aurelio Rojas [arojas@sacbee.com](mailto:arojas@sacbee.com)

BODY:

Five years after Arnold Schwarzenegger rode into the governor's office vowing to root out waste in state spending to help balance the budget, legislative leaders are taking another crack at the elusive target.

Sen. President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, and Assembly Speaker Karen Bass, D-Los Angeles, are crafting more measured bipartisan approaches than the Republican governor, who famously promised to "blow up the boxes" of bureaucratic inefficiency.

That effort led to the governor's 2004 "California Performance Review," which critics say left the state with 2,500 pages of recommendations and little real change in how California does business.

Steinberg bristles at suggestions his effort will meet a similar fate.

"It's the Legislature's responsibility to provide oversight over the executive branch and its agencies -- that's our job, and that muscle has not been flexed in any kind of ongoing way for a long time," he said.

Steinberg has formed the Senate Office of Oversight and Outcomes, hoping that two former newspaper reporters and a lawyer can succeed where bureaucrats failed.

Steinberg said the unit will not cost taxpayers extra money, adding that it is being funded by "moving existing resources around" within the Senate's \$111.3 million budget this year.

In the Assembly, Bass has named Assemblyman Hector De La Torre, D-South Gate, to chair the new Assembly Accountability and Administrative Review Committee.

The purpose of the committee, Bass said, is "to be proactive and examine the functions of various departments."

"Maybe there's some programs that are duplicated in various agencies," Bass said. "Maybe there's contracts that have gone on too long that aren't really efficient anymore, and maybe we need to terminate those contracts."

With some 200,000 employees, more than 150 agencies and departments, and an annual budget that exceeds \$100 billion, California state government can be an impenetrable labyrinth.

When Schwarzenegger ran for governor in 2003, he promised to "end the crazy deficit spending" by conducting a comprehensive audit and getting rid of waste. His effort fell apart a year later when multiple interest groups protested that recommended cuts would hurt the public.

John Pitney, political professor at Claremont McKenna College, said cutting waste is a "tempting political position to take because nobody, in principle, supports waste."

"But beyond administrative inefficiencies, every program is there because somebody supports it," Pitney said.

As a result, the efforts commonly end in inertia. When Schwarzenegger's audit was released, the state had a \$15 billion budget deficit. Today, the estimated deficit for the fiscal year ending July 1 is roughly the same size.

"If we're able to do this job well, we'll be able to help out a little bit," De La Torre said, adding that doing so would "minimize ... the damage that is being done by this horrible economy."

Steinberg said the "framework" for his effort is a group called California Forward.

The bipartisan organization, chaired by former Democratic Congressman Leon Panetta, has mounted a three-year, \$16 million effort funded by foundations to try to find solutions for such intractable state problems as unbalanced budgets and partisan gridlock.

Steinberg said his unit will focus on measuring program "outcomes" rather than taking a "gotcha" muckraking approach.

Two of the three people Steinberg has hired for the new unit are former newspaper reporters.

Dorothy Korber won a prestigious Polk Award at The Sacramento Bee for articles showing how California Highway Patrol officials who were close to retirement inflated their pensions by submitting dubious disability and on-the-job injury claims.

While at the Los Angeles Times, Nancy Vogel disclosed that then-Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, traveled the world in luxury, paying with campaign funds for visits to some of the finest hotels and restaurants and for purchases at high-end retailers.

The third member of the unit is John Adkisson, a law school classmate of Steinberg, whom the senator calls "the most talented investigative lawyer that I've ever met."

The unit will not have subpoena power but will be under the purview of the Senate Rules Committee, which on rare occasions has granted that power.

"We're going to begin measuring the relationship between taxpayer dollars and the outcome promised by a particular program or investment," Steinberg said.

Steinberg said one of the tasks he's given the unit is to distinguish itself from the Legislative Analyst's Office and Bureau of State Audits, both of which examine the operations of taxpayer-financed programs.

Too much of state government, he said, is "process" and "nobody is doing outcome-based work."

"The LAO is not doing that, and the state auditor does mostly fiscal and programmatic audits," he said.

Republicans are also seizing the opportunity to put state spending under the microscope.

Sen. Mark Wyland, R-Solana Beach, has introduced Senate Bill 9 to require the state auditor to conduct a performance evaluation of every state government program and expenditure every two years.

Last week, Senate Republican leader Dave Cogdill of Modesto and Assembly Republican leader Mike Villines of Clovis sent a letter to Steinberg and Bass requesting that their committees begin their work by reviewing the state's fastest growing programs.

The top four programs the Republicans singled out -- in-home supportive services for low-income disabled people, supplemental security income/state supplementary payments for the low-income elderly, blind and disabled, Medi-Cal and developmental services -- make up much of the social service safety net that Democrats have fought to construct.

"If we are not able to rein in the cost of these expensive and ever-growing programs, we will either have to eliminate funding for other important programs or increase the tax burden on our state's already-overburdened taxpayers to pay for them," the Republican leaders wrote.

The efforts may yield "some waste, fraud and abuse and make government more efficient," Pitney said. "But it's not going to be enough to balance the budget."

Call Aurelio Rojas, Bee Capitol Bureau, (916) 326-5545.