

Most Lawmakers Are Failing Us

By Jon Coupal Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

Each fall, the Legislature adjourns so lawmakers can return home and tell their constituents what a marvelous job they are doing. Many, who are focused on reelection or higher office, will have to spin a really good yarn to convince voters that their performance merits more time in Sacramento.

A story of accomplishment will be a hard sell for those who approved \$12.6 billion worth of new tax increases last February. That equates to a \$1200 increase for a family of four at a time when they can least afford it. The only "success" of the Legislature has been to reinforce California's reputation as having the worst tax and regulatory climates in America. The state's unemployment rate is now at 12.5 percent, and 3.7 million workers are either unemployed or underemployed. That's a full 19% of the workforce who wants a full time job and doesn't have one.

Of course income and sales tax revenue has declined drastically since the tax hikes, as legislators fail to understand that increased taxes will negatively impact consumer behavior. Because of that and other unrealistic revenue assumptions, California is now facing a \$21 billion deficit over the next two years. Further compounding their culpability, most Sacramento politicians chose to ignore the clear lesson of the 1991 tax increases, which produced less revenue for the following two years.

A recent poll shows that voters sense that lawmakers are failing them. The Field Poll found that only 13 percent of the state's registered voters approve of the Legislature's performance, the lowest rating since the survey group started measuring opinions of that institution in 1983.

Excuses like, "it's the national economy" won't wash. California has become a laughingstock and the national poster child for government mismanagement. However, there are a few lawmakers who will legitimately be able to claim "it was the other guys" who got us into this mess.

To sort out who are the malefactors and who are good stewards of the voters' confidence, the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association tracks the votes of all lawmakers on taxpayer related measures and issues its annual HJTA Legislative Report Card. For the 2009 session, 35 bills were used to evaluate and grade voting records and over half of lawmakers are failing.

Out of 120 members of the Legislature, 73 received a grade of "F" for 2009. On the other end of the spectrum, 29 received a grade of "A." Only two, Assembly Members Joel Anderson and Diane Harkey, received perfect scores.

Lawmakers have to work very hard to fail. Voting for taxpayers' interests just over 30 percent of the time earns a better grade.

Sadly, many of these politicians are so dedicated to picking taxpayers' pockets that they have no shame. Some may actually regard their "Fs" as a badge of honor.

The Legislative Report Card is designed to help Californians gauge how their own state representatives are actually performing based on what they have done, not on what they say, and to hold them accountable.

To view all grades and the methodology on which they are based, go to www.hjta.org/legislative/report-cards/.

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