

## **California Executive Update for March 2007**

### **Legislation**

While less than 300 bills had been introduced during the first two months of the 2007 session, approximately 2,600 bills hit the desk in the week before the February 23 deadline. At least 30 days must pass before these bills can be heard in committee. This means that beginning the last week in March and early April there will be hundreds of bills being heard by policy committees each week. The Legislature will be on its Spring Break the first week of April, returning to work on April 9<sup>th</sup>. It is expected that the work pace will pick up significantly at that time.

### **Proposed Workers' Compensation Legislation**

There are currently more than 30 bills that have been introduced in the California Legislature relating to proposed changes in the workers' compensation laws. Several of the bills are "spot" bills, or bills with generalized language that have been introduced in order to get past the introduction deadline, but which will be amended at a later date with more substantive language. The more important question is what the governor will do when faced with proposed changes to his workers' compensation reforms that were put in place in the first months of his administration. Joe Manero and Tim Flanigan, CNA's California lobbyist, recently met with a high official in the administration who assured them that the governor is determined to keep his reforms in place and unchanged by the current onslaught of legislative proposals.

### **Governor Signs Law that Moves the California Primary to February**

Californians will choose their presidential candidates in February instead of June of 2008, as previously scheduled. A proposal to reschedule the primary cleared the Legislature in March and was immediately signed into law by the governor.

Holding the primary earlier in the year is meant to give California some influence in selecting the next president. The earlier primary will force candidates to address issues of importance to California—such as immigration—which do not necessarily resonate in Iowa and New Hampshire where voting takes place in January.

Under the new law, primary elections for state (as opposed to federal) offices will still be held in June.

### **Term-limits Initiative Proposed**

The goal of relaxing legislative term limits has emerged as a political priority for the governor and legislative leaders this year. Two political consultants working with Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez introduced a proposed ballot initiative in February which would cut the total amount of time that newly elected lawmakers could serve in the Legislature from 14 years to 12, but would allow them to spend all of those years in a

single house. Under the current system, lawmakers can serve a total of 14 years, but are limited to three assembly terms and two Senate terms.

Supporters of the initiative see it as a way of bringing more stability to the Legislature. Term limits have caused widespread turnover in the Legislature, ending the careers of lawmakers who had been in office for many years. Doing so has helped bring more diversity to the Legislature, but it has also created turmoil. Critics argue that the lack of legislative experience and institutional memory has made lobbyists and staff members more powerful and reduced the checks and balances lawmakers place on the executive branch.

Backers of this initiative will have a hard sell with voters, many of whom favor the idea of term limits. Legislators are painfully aware of their low approval ratings in recent statewide polls and are currently risk averse regarding any bill that might cause controversy. They are going out of their way to put the skids on any legislation that would draw adverse publicity to the process and, as a consequence, jeopardize their chances of reforming the current term limit rules.