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As We See It: Budget battle: Brown's plan deserves support

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How important is a quick resolution of the battle over California's forlorn budget?

Very.

And, despite the almost willful failure of both Republicans and Democrats to work with Gov. Jerry Brown to produce a budget devoid of gimmicks and wishful thinking, there's still time to get it right.

Brown did his part Thursday by vetoing the terrible budget Democrats passed -- produced with a sword held over their heads, since they knew they wouldn't be paid unless a budget was produced by the regularly ignored constitutional deadline of June 15.

Brown still needs four Republican votes to bring tax extensions to voters, and he continues to warn of devastating cuts to schools and other publicly funded agencies if he can't close the remaining \$9.6 billion deficit.

Local school districts, meanwhile, are dealing with issues such as teacher layoffs, class sizes and the length of the school year, while remaining in the dark about further cuts from the state.

Community colleges have already raised per-unit fees -- more drastic reductions in state funding could cause these fees to rise further for two-year schools, which serve many students who can't afford to go to four-year schools.

The University of California and California State

University systems already are confronting \$500 million cuts each -- and unless the budget is balanced honestly, with additional revenues along with spending cuts, this will surely grow worse.

In addition,

the state has to deal with rising prison costs and a court order to reduce overcrowding. Brown already has legislative approval to move nonviolent offenders to local jurisdictions -- but no money to send along with the inmates.

Then there's the redevelopment mess. Brown has wanted to close down the agencies to find money to send along to schools and for public safety. That spurred local governments to quickly move to secure funds to pay for redevelopment projects already on the books. Redevelopment agencies use increases in property tax values to pay for affordable housing and economic development. Although the money is supposed to go to build up blighted areas, critics have noted it doesn't always happen that way and that the system is rife with abuses.

The latest twist came Wednesday when Democrats put together redevelopment bills in the Assembly and Senate that would have permitted redevelopment agencies to remain in



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existence -- if they agree to come up with their share of a \$1.7 billion payment for schools next year and then agree to send along their portion of \$400 million payments in succeeding years.

In other words, goodbye redevelopment. As one state legislator said last week, the payments amounted to "extortion."

As of this writing, Brown hasn't vetoed the redevelopment bills and a statewide redevelopment organization vows to file a lawsuit if the agencies are sent packing.

Amid all this, Democrats are angry Brown vetoed their budget and accuse him of kowtowing to Republicans in an effort to get his tax election.

Republicans remain unwilling to go along with anything associated with tax hikes and polls show support for the tax extensions, which expire June 30, dropping like a stone.

Murky? The way this budget fight is being waged it might as well be happening at the bottom of Monterey Bay.

To answer Republican demands, Brown has offered significant concessions on pension reform and a spending cap, along with relaxing regulations business leaders say are costing jobs in California. In return, he wants to extend the taxes now and then ask voters for their approval.

His plan is the only honest and realistic answer for the state and it should be put in place.



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