



## Governor Brown's Budget Head Fake

By George Runner

If you fall for an opponent's head fake in sports, you risk losing the game. The stakes are much higher for taxpayers. If they fall for the Governor's head fake this November, the price tag could be as high as \$50 billion dollars by 2019.

Don't be fooled. The Governor and Legislature have for months been carefully orchestrating a head fake of massive proportions designed to scare Californians into voting for higher taxes.

At the center of this head fake are \$6 billion dollars of "trigger cuts" contained in this year's recently signed budget.

The budget hopes voters will approve raising taxes by \$8.5 billion a year. The trigger cuts kick-in only if voters reject higher taxes this November.

There's no good reason for the Legislature to postpone balancing the budget. There's also no reason, except political games, why 99% of the trigger cuts target schools.

About half of California's state budget funds education. This year's budget grows school funding by 6.7 billion—14%. Including both general and special funds, K-12 will get \$68.4 billion and higher education will receive \$23.1 billion.

Governor Brown insists nothing fishy is going on. When he unveiled his budget in January, he claimed his numbers "emanate from the bowels of the Finance Department bureaucracy."

The experts aren't buying it. Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California, called the Governor's plan the "largest ransom note in California political history."

Allow me to explain: the Governor and his allies want more of your hard-earned money. But they also know most voters won't agree to send more dollars to Sacramento to fund growing welfare entitlement programs, state worker pensions and the like—especially when the Legislature refuses to reform these programs.

The Governor and his allies linked their tax increase scheme to something voters really care about—teachers and schools. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, K-12 education is the budget area most Californians would like to see spared from cuts—58% of likely voters and 64% of public school parents chose it over three other major areas of state spending.

In alliance with the Governor, the Attorney General has already titled the Governor’s ballot measure “Temporary Taxes to Fund Education” to make sure you understand school funding is at stake.

In case that wasn’t enough to increase his chances of victory, the Governor and his friends have even found a clever way to move their tax hike to the top of the ballot. They think you’re more likely to vote yes before you get worn out reading the dozen or so measures on November’s ballot.

It will still be an uphill battle. California voters have rejected eight consecutive efforts to raise taxes at the ballot box. The most recent vote in June was a measure aimed at raising cigarette taxes by a dollar a pack. It failed.

If this pattern continues and voters reject the Governor’s tax hike plan, the full trigger cuts probably won’t happen.

Case in point—last year’s budget contained \$2.5 billion in trigger cuts. These cuts were to be implemented if revenues fell short mid-year. When revenues did fall short, the Governor only imposed \$980 million of the cuts, sparing K-12 classrooms from a \$1.5 billion loss in funding.

There are always other options. Republican lawmakers offered a budget plan this year that protected education funding and did not raise taxes. Since Republican votes are no longer needed to approve budgets, that plan was ignored by the Democrat majority.

Don’t get faked out by slick campaign commercials urging you to vote for school funding. They’re but a final move in a carefully orchestrated head fake designed to take more of your money to Sacramento.

*Elected in November 2010, George Runner represents more than nine million Californians as a member of the State Board of Equalization. For more information, visit [www.boe.ca.gov/Runner](http://www.boe.ca.gov/Runner).*