



Republicans show courage in opposing Brown's tax extension

As seen in the Sacramento Bee

By George Runner

Conventional wisdom in California's perennial budget crisis is that lawmakers who support tax increases are courageous, while those who refuse to go along are, well, cowards.

The John F. Kennedy Library Foundation reinforced this misguided notion last year by handing out "Profiles in Courage" awards to four legislative leaders who inflicted billions in higher taxes on average Californians struggling to survive a steep economic downturn.

Courage, it seems to some, is the willingness to pick another's pocket when one's own bank account balance is running low.

Despite his public persona of frugality, Gov. Jerry Brown shares this view.

In his State of the State address earlier this year, Brown argued that California would once again be a leader in "job creation, renewable energy and education" if lawmakers could find "courage to tackle our budget deficit head-on."

For the political layman, tackling our budget deficit "head-on" is the governor's code phrase for billions in more taxes, which Brown fervently supports.

Case in point, last month the governor used a crime victims rally to send an even more pointed message. He told the victims: "I'm hoping that your courage will become contagious and inspire the reluctant few Republicans who we need to join up and get our budget done."

Thanks to an initiative approved by voters last fall, the governor and a simple majority of his legislative allies are free to pass a budget based on anticipated revenues – about \$85 billion – with no Republican votes at all. The only reason the governor wants Republican votes is because he needs a two-thirds vote to raise taxes.

By way of perspective, the state of California's budget was less than \$85 billion as recently as 2004. If the state bureaucracy survived on that amount before, it can do it again.

According to Merriam-Webster, courage is "the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere and withstand danger, fear or difficulty." Cowardice is the opposite.

It may be the governor himself who lacks courage to close a budget deal.

In March, five Republican senators reported that they had "reached an impasse" in negotiations with the governor because their "substantive reform proposals to create jobs, require responsible state spending, eliminate abusive pension practices and implement meaningful governmental reforms" had been "either rejected or so watered down as to have no real effect."

The senators concluded that the governor was "unable to compel other stakeholders to accept real reform."

Later that same month, it was the governor, not the Republicans, who pulled the plug on budget negotiations. Rather unconvincingly, the governor claimed a deal was impossible because Republicans were asking for too many reforms.

New California Republican Party chairman Tom Del Beccaro recently took Brown to task in an op-ed titled "If Only Jerry Brown Had Andrew Cuomo's Courage." Del Beccaro argues that true courage is being shown by New York's governor, a Democrat, who rather than raise taxes is trimming government bureaucracy and waste to close his state's budget deficit.

When asked why he won't support increasing taxes, Cuomo explains: "I believe it's counterproductive for the state. I believe more people will leave the state and you'll have less revenue."

According to the Tax Foundation, New Yorkers have an even higher tax burden than Californians – but both states have the dismal distinction of making the top 10 list of states with high taxes.

Does Brown really believe he will lower California's unemployment rate – which remains among the worst in the nation – by raising taxes to New York levels or higher? Does he really think job creators want to come to a state with high taxes, high costs and regulatory uncertainty?

True courage is exhibited by men and women who are willing to stand for their convictions against incredible opposition.

But having courage means little if you're wrong.

I recently heard an elected official from the Bay Area proclaim that she believes taxes should be higher. She certainly displays courage by honestly communicating her belief.

But she's wrong. And anyone else who thinks higher taxes will help California's private sector economy create jobs and be more competitive is also wrong.

The true unsung heroes in California's budget crisis are those lawmakers who have the courage to oppose higher taxes despite tremendous pressure to compromise.

Though the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation may refuse to acknowledge them, overtaxed Californians are grateful for their courage.