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SENATE BITES BULLET, SENDS BUDGET BILL TO ASSEMBLY—

Schiff Cardenas Crime Prevention Act, After School Programs Survive, School Safety Funds are Suspended, Other programs are reduced or eliminated

by David Steinhart

Last night – a month after the deadline for adoption of the FY 03-04 California Budget – the State Senate approved a compromise budget bill (AB 1765) and sent it to the Assembly. This was a breakthrough in what is generally recognized to be the most contorted and painful partisan budget battle in California history.

With the Assembly unable to put together its own plan to close the state's \$ 38 billion deficit, the task of resolving bitter partisan differences on tax and spending policies fell to two men, Senators John Burton (D.- S.F.) and Jim Brulte (R.- Rancho Cucamonga). They produced a \$ 71 billion general fund budget that nobody liked, but was able to get off the Senate Floor on Sunday July 27th on a 27-10 vote including 5 Republican yes votes. As Burton said of the budget after the vote: "There's something in here for everybody to hate".

By and large, Republicans were able to make good on their "no new taxes" mantra in this Senate Budget. Most of the deficit was erased on paper by a combination of borrowing, expenditure deferrals and program cuts. The pending Governor's recall election, set for October 7th, emboldened Republicans in their dual quest to unseat Gray Davis and shrink the cost of state government.

Public safety programs in this Senate budget were little changed from the Governor's May Revision. Key items of interest to youth crime and violence prevention advocates were:

- *Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act*: Funded in the Senate budget at \$100

million for FY 03/04, down from \$ 116 million the previous year. COPS funds, paired by legislative formula with CPA funds, also would drop to \$ 100 million statewide.

- *After school program* funding stays at \$ 121.5 million in general fund dollars, unchanged from the Governor's May Revision amount.
- *School safety funding* took a hit: all \$ 82 million in annual grant funds through the Department of Education was suspended for FY 03/04.

The Senate Budget also eliminated the Office of Criminal Justice Planning (OCJP). Under the Senate plan, OCJP's grant programs will be distributed to other agencies, with juvenile justice programs (including JJDPA funds) going to the state Board of Corrections. An earlier proposal by Republicans to eliminate the Board of Corrections never went forward. The Youth Authority's budget was trimmed with a planned, partial closure of the Ventura training school, but at the same time, Senators hiked the fees counties pay for CYA commitments by 18 percent.

This is still only the Senate's version of the Budget Act. It now moves to the Assembly for review. However, the Assembly is even more politically fractured than the Senate and has no duplicate for the leader team of Burton and Brulte that produced the Senate compromise. So it would seem that the line of least resistance for the Assembly is simply to approve the Budget bill already crafted in the Senate. Delay is costing the state dearly, in mounting expenses and lowered credit ratings, and voters are becoming increasingly disgruntled with the Legislature's budget performance to date.

Assembly amendments would also mean that the Senate has to reconvene – which its leaders do not want to do. Yet in this wild budget year, nothing is final until the Governor puts the budget to bed with his signature. Onlookers will just have to wait and see how the Assembly handles the Senate's move. The most likely scenario is relatively swift approval of the Senate version with Governor's action to follow quickly.