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Editorial

## Humanizing California's budget

**The Legislature should fine-tune Gov. Brown's spending plan to include the middle class and not just the poor in his proposed cuts.**

January 17, 2011

Gov. Jerry Brown warned that his stark budget proposal, if adopted as is, would hit all Californians hard but that it would reflect the state's values. In fact, it would be a better proposal, and would do a better job of reflecting the values that have served us well, if it spread the pain further and held fewer Californians harmless. Too many of the cuts fall on the neediest people who have been hurt most deeply by the economic downturn, and will cost the state more even after recovery. Now it's the Legislature's turn to take Brown's good start and fine-tune it into something more workable and humane.

It was perhaps politically shrewd of the governor to put so much of the burden on a class of people not personally known to many voters. In a popular but mistaken view, families that get public assistance from the state — job training from CalWORKS, state-funded child care so they can work and Medi-Cal assistance so they can take their children to doctors early instead of waiting at emergency rooms — are the source of much of California's economic pain. It may be that Brown believes cutting aid to this group is a necessary precondition to winning approval at the ballot box for his plan to extend temporary increases in sales and vehicle taxes and to reinstate an income tax surcharge and credit reduction.

To win those five-year tax extensions, Brown first has to get some Republican support to even have them placed on the ballot; then he has to persuade voters to adopt them. It won't be easy. But the taxes are one of the few parts of the plan that affect the average California family directly. In many other areas, middle-class citizens won't feel the pain. Spending on streets, highways and prisons is shielded. Drivers may still complain about traffic, and neighbors may still worry about crime, but the budget takes nothing from those programs. K-12 schools keep last year's funding. For the most part, middle-class families will only notice the direct impact of Brown's cuts if they have children headed for state universities.

The governor said he didn't want to discuss the additional \$12 billion in cuts that would become necessary if the tax extensions are rejected, but he should reconsider — so voters know that transportation, prisons and schools are also at stake.

Meanwhile, lawmakers should do what they can to plug some gaping holes in the human services safety net — or all of us will become more directly acquainted with ill and elderly family members who must give up in-home care and be placed in more expensive and less successful nursing homes, or with neighbors who must give up their CalWORKS jobs or skip early medical treatment — and thus become a continuing burden to county and city budgets in years to come.

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