

Budget Reforms Under Study by Assembly Group

By VINCENT THOMAS

Assemblyman, 65th District
Possible reorganization of state government in the interests of greater economy is an important topic which the Assembly committee on governmental organization now is considering. The prospects of a state deficit of more than \$200 million at the end of the current year is causing your legislators to explore thoroughly every suggestion which could produce savings in state costs.

Also under study are some proposed budget reforms, designed to give the Legislature greater control over appropriations for various state functions. At present, more two-thirds of the \$2 billion budget is fixed either by the Constitution or by statutory appropriations. In addition, special funds financed from earmarked revenues such as hunting and fishing and other licenses are practically exempt from legislative supervision. As a result of these two facts, the committee was informed, only about one fifth of the total budget is subject to complete control.

IN THE INTERESTS of economy, both the legislative analyst and the department of finance recommended to the committee that greater control over expenditures can be restored to your law-makers. Pointing out that governmental "fixed charges" fall into two categories, contractual or moral obligations, and charges fixed by statute chiefly to avoid a annual legislative review, spokesmen suggested as a basic change that all fixed charges except those relating to state bonds be removed from the Constitution.

Also proposed was that many of the statutory fixed charges be removed from law in order to leave decisions concerning the functions they finance to the Legislature. Still another idea advanced was that certain earmarked revenues be transferred to the general fund so the program they support could "take potluck along with other controllable costs."

ANTICIPATING fears that such financial changes might reduce or otherwise damage state functions now protected by fixed charge legislation, witnesses said that there can be no reason to assume that the Legislature would deal more harshly with programs protected by fixed appropriations than it would with unfixed functions not so guarded. It was pointed out that certain expenditures represent moral obligations on the part of the state government. Other agencies and even individuals must be able to depend on the fact that such obligations will be met.

Debt service costs, school support, social security, maintenance of the university and colleges, mental and correctional institution costs were mentioned as examples of items that could not possibly be overlooked by any Legislature.

IN ADDITION to reforms in budgetary law, the legislative analyst also recommended establishment of a unified state department of revenue as a step in the direction of bringing state costs. He estimated that savings from such a consolidation might be as much as \$3 million per year. The idea is not new, but bills to carry it out have failed in several previous sessions.

The interim committee indicated that it plans to draft specific proposals along several lines to aid in eliminating the expected multi-million deficit. They will be introduced to the Legislature when it convenes in January.

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