

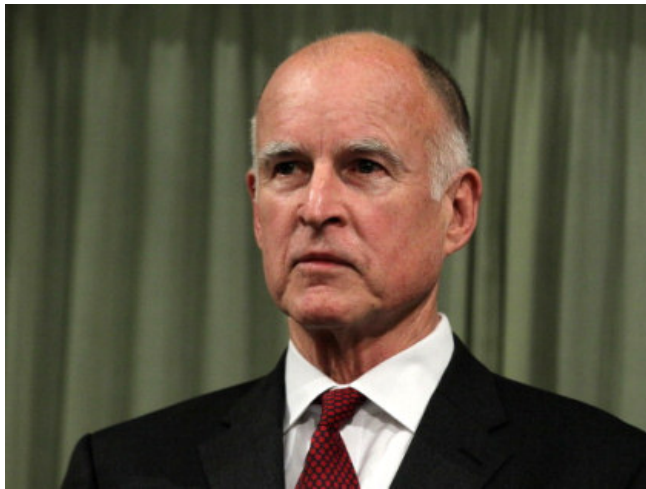
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POLITICS

Gov. Brown Optimistic On GOP Support For Tax Extensions

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California Governor Jerry Brown looks on before delivering the State of the State address at the State Capitol on January 31, 2011 in Sacramento. (Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

SAN FRANCISCO (CBS SF) – Gov. Jerry Brown expressed optimism Tuesday that he can garner Republican support for his plan to help balance the budget with tax extensions, despite months of failed attempts at reaching across the aisle.

The \$13.5 billion in revenue generated by the tax extensions would be coupled with more than \$11 billion in spending cuts passed last month to close a \$26 billion budget deficit.

KCBS' Doug Sovern Reports:

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After months of negotiations, not a single Republican in the state Senate or Assembly has agreed to a ballot initiative that would let voters choose to maintain current levels of sales taxes, vehicle-licensing fees and other revenue generators set to expire this year. Brown, however, said members of the Republican Party would have no choice but to "get realistic" about the budget soon.

"Getting at \$13.5 billion is going to take taxes," he told reporters following a speech at the Bay Area Council's annual Outlook Conference. "If not taxes, it's going to take a radical restructuring of public safety and education. If there's a third way, I'd like to see it."

He said he wasn't bluffing about balancing the budget entirely with cuts and was confident that key Republican votes would be forthcoming.

"As the reality of the cuts sinks in and hits home, people get more realistic," he said. "Right now the magical thinking that \$13.5 billion can be conjured is still working its magic."

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Brown had just finished outlining his budget plan in detail to attendees of the Outlook Conference, an annual gathering of industry leaders to discuss business, the economy and politics.

The governor received a standing ovation before and after his speech, during which he outlined the budget deficit's origins and details and his plan to resolve it.

The state has cut billions of dollars in taxes over the past two decades, and as revenues have gone down, spending has gone up, he said. Lawmakers this year inherited a \$9.4 billion deficit from last year's budget, which was allegedly balanced when it was passed in October.

Brown said only 3.4 percent of the state's expenses are related to pensions and health care — two areas that some GOP lawmakers have said need to be reformed if they are going to support a tax extension initiative.

"When people say you have to do something about pensions, they're missing the point," Brown said. "We're facing a huge, immediate deficit."

On Tuesday, Senate GOP leader Connie Conway of Tulare said the "people have spoken" on the issue of taxes.

"In May 2009, voters overwhelmingly rejected the very tax increases the liberal majority is pushing today," she said in a statement.

"Our hard-working constituents ... don't want to pay a \$55 billion tax increase to fund a 31 percent increase in state spending over three years," Conway said.

Brown argued that the extensions he is proposing are not excessive "by any historical standard."

"This plan does not envision pay raises or new programs for four years," he added.

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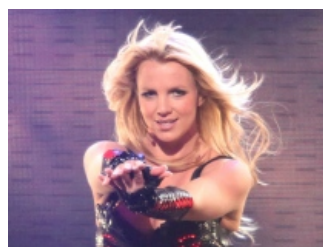
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