

## **HYBRID HELP**

The Michigan Legislature approved \$78 million in tax credits for Ford to develop battery packs for future hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles, according to the Detroit Free Press. The company said the credits will help create 1,000 new jobs, which includes moving the production facility from Mexico to Michigan. The tax breaks are for years 2012 to 2014 and also include credits for General Motors and Dow Kokam, but will be given only if the companies create the number of new jobs required by the law and produce a minimum of hybrid batteries.

### SEARCHING FOR HAPPY

Yet another new happiness survey ranks states according to various things ranging from availability of public land to commuting time to local taxes to how satisfied residents are with their lives, according to the Associated Press. Louisiana ranked No. 1. The study, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, surveyed 1.3 million people over four years and found the happiest people tend to live in the states that do well in other quality-of-life studies. Rounding out the top five happiest states were Hawaii, Florida, Tennessee and Arizona.

### **BROADBAND WINNERS**

Vice President Joe Biden announced the first wave of broadband stimulus awards at the end of December. Eighteen projects in 17 states will share \$183 million in federal grants to expand broadband access and adoption. The projects receiving funds are the first in the \$7.2 billion program. The awards are designed to help underserved communities. Projects include building connections to communities lacking broadband access; connecting homes, hospitals and schools to current broadband infrastructure; expanding capacity to libraries and community colleges; and promoting broadband use.

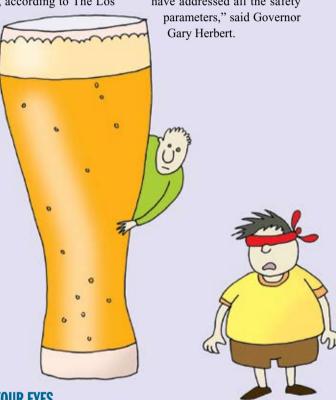
### OUCH

Only 17 percent of voters in California and New York approve of the job their state lawmakers are doing, according to new polls by two different research groups. California's governor didn't do much better-Arnold Schwarzenengger's approval rating was at a career low of 27 percent. In both states, the economy and state finances were at the top of voters' concerns. State budget problems were the second most cited worry, with 13 percent calling the budget the most important issue facing the state, according to The Los

have addressed all the safety Angeles Times.

# FOR AWHILE, AT LEAST

Utah has come to an agreement with the U.S. Energy Department to allow a trainload of depleted uranium from South Carolina to come to the state, but only for temporary storage, according to The Salt Lake Tribune. The waste was already on its way west when the agreement was struck. It still may go into the ground for permanent disposal after that state completes its sitesafety review. "We simply will not accept any more depleted uranium for storage in this state until we are convinced that we



# **COVER YOUR EYES**

A new law in Maine that was supposed to help the state's specialty beer and liquor stores is having quite the hangover effect. The law authorizes stores that stock a large variety of alcohol to conduct up to a dozen taste testings a year, as a way to compete equally with wine shops. An amendment added at the last minute required the testings to be conducted without the possibility of children observing them. That's what's causing the buzz—shops with windows have had to cover them and parents with children in tow have been unable to buy a bottle of wine. The Legislature, at press time, will be looking at fixing the problem through a new bill that would require establishments place a sign at their entrance when a tasting event is being held. Others hope the Legislature will reconsider other limits in the original law as well.



**BAD KARMA** 

Yoga enthusiasts are angry over a couple of new state laws. The Missouri Department of Revenue has recently told yoga studios they must charge a 4 percent sales tax on class fees, which it now classifies as recreation. Supporters maintain that yoga practice is more of a spiritual pursuit than merely an exercise class. And in Virginia, a state plan to regulate and license yoga teachers is causing quite the stir. The state Council of Higher Education wants to certify yoga teacher training as it does the teaching of dog groomers, dancing instructors and bartenders, according to the Associated Press. Instructors say the plan infringes on their free speech rights and would be costly and time consuming. Last year, Yoga Journal estimated that the practice has grown into a \$6 billion industry.

### **PHOSPHATE FREE**

A new law in Wisconsin limits phosphorus to no more than 0.5 percent of automatic dishwasher soap sold in the state starting in July. Washington was the first state in July 2008 to enact a ban for the Spokane area. More than a dozen states have since passed similar laws. But the transition to phosphate-free products has not been easy. Consumers complain that the detergents perform poorly. Commercial and industrial detergents are not included in the bans. Phosphates in lakes and streams act as fertilizers, causing algae to crowd out other aquatic life.

### **BISON BEWARE**

Nine environmental and American Indian groups have sued two federal agencies to stop the killing of bison that migrate out of Yellowstone National Park, according to the Associated Press. During the last decade, more than 3,300 bison have been killed to prevent the spread of brucellosis to area cattle. "It's crazy for me to think that in a state like Montana, where we are rich in wildlife and wildlands, that we don't have room for bison," said Tom Woodbury with the Western Watersheds Project. Bison once roamed North America by the millions before being largely wiped out in the late 1800s.

### AS EASY AS 911

California lawmakers are looking at making it a crime for witnesses not to report homicides, rapes and other violent attacks. The legislation, sponsored by Assemblyman Pedro Nava, was prompted by the gang rape of a 16-year-old student who was attacked for about two hours while at least a dozen witnesses failed to call police, according to The Los Angeles Times. The legislation would close a loophole in current state law that only makes it illegal for witnesses not to report a crime against a child under age 14. The Witness Responsibility Act would require witnesses to call authorities during violent crimes.



### **DOGGIE DELIGHT**

Puppies Behind Bars, a program that prepares dogs to work as aides to disabled veterans, is now in six prisons in three states. It uses prisoners (with long enough sentences to make the two-year commitment) to train dogs to do things such as turn on lights, call 911 and stand guard. "There's no way to prepare for the day when my best friend has to leave," wrote one prisoner in his journal. "I hope she makes life easier for that person and that both of them live life to the fullest. Make sure she gets plenty of belly rubs, because she loves that." The cost of raising, training and placing a dog is \$26,000, funded by private donations and grants from nonprofit organizations.

FEBRUARY 2010 STATE LEGISLATURES 11