



1

PERK PARKED

California lawmakers are losing one of their most unique perks—state vehicles. For years, the state has provided legislators with cars, covering the leasing costs up to \$285 a month, as well as insurance, gas and maintenance expenses. The state Citizens’ Compensation Commission last year put an end to the program, however, recommending instead to give legislators an additional \$300 a month for transportation costs. The state controller questioned the commission’s authority to create the new allowance, based on state law that allows only mileage reimbursement, leaving a final decision up in the air. Ironically, paying 55.5 cents a mile to lawmakers in a state that covers 155,779.22 square miles could end up costing taxpayers even more.

3



THE SIOUX SAGA

The battle over the “Fighting Sioux” nickname for the University of North Dakota continues to rage. Last April, the state passed a law forbidding a change and requiring use of the Fighting Sioux name. But by the end of the year, lawmakers had repealed the law and required a name change. Nickname supporters, seeking a referendum in June, filed petitions in February against the repeal. Now the state’s higher education board has requested the attorney general ask the state Supreme Court to rule on the constitutionality of the first law requiring use of the name. Legislative leaders have hired an attorney to represent the Legislative Assembly in the case. The issue at stake for them is the legislature’s authority and role in higher education decisions.



2

DON'T GAMBLE WITH GETTYSBURG

Pennsylvania Representative Paul Clymer (R) has introduced a bill to prevent casinos from being built within 10 miles of the famous Gettysburg Civil War battlefield or the new federally sanctioned memorial park in honor of Flight 93, which crashed near there on 9/11. “The courage and bravery of those men, on both sides, is a legacy that should not be compromised by putting a gambling casino near the military park, or near the site of the Flight 93 memorial,” Clymer told a House committee, according to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

5

JOBS APLENTY

Those seeking work may want to look north to South Dakota. That state is swimming in job openings, especially for accountants, engineers, IT specialists and welders. To fill the positions, the governor has created the “1,000 New South Dakotans” initiative. It will, in part, direct the state to contract with the Manpower recruitment firm to find workers willing to move to the Mount Rushmore State. South Dakotans will get first crack at the vacant jobs, but after 30 days, Manpower will step in to help fill them. The Legislature is considering the governor’s proposal now. The state’s unemployment rate is 4.2 percent, lower than every state except neighboring North Dakota (3.3 percent) and Nebraska (4.1 percent).



TAXING TIMES

4

The Tax Foundation, which collects all kinds of data on state and local sales taxes, has found that Tennessee (9.45 percent), Arizona (9.12 percent), Louisiana (8.85 percent), Washington (8.8 percent) and Oklahoma (8.66 percent) have the highest combined state and average local sales tax rates. The highest total sales tax rate is in Tuba City, Ariz., where you’ll pay 13.725 percent. That rate includes a tribal tax of 6 percent by the To’Nanees’Dizi government. Alaska and Montana do not levy statewide sales taxes but allow towns and cities to do so. Three states—Delaware, New Hampshire and Oregon—have no state or local sales taxes.

6

THE BEGINNING OF BEING

The Oklahoma Senate has passed a “personhood” bill, giving an embryo, from the moment of conception, “the rights, privileges and immunities available to other persons, citizens and residents.” It now goes to the House. Senator Brian Crain (R), sponsor of the bill, said it is not about blocking access to contraceptives, preventing stem-cell research or banning abortion. It’s about the fact that “the unborn have no voice of their own,” he told the Tulsa World. Senator Judy Eason McIntyre (D) told the newspaper she was disturbed that men who want smaller government and less government intrusion are trying to make personal health decisions for women. Similar ballot measures have failed in Mississippi and twice in Colorado. Similar legislation was considered in the Virginia General Assembly.



7

REACTION TO NUCLEAR PLANTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission voted in February to approve a construction permit from Southern Company to build two new nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle, in eastern Georgia. The new reactors will join two existing reactors that have been operating for 23 and 25 years. Southern Company estimates the deal will bring 3,500 construction jobs and 800 permanent jobs into the state. It’s the first construction permit in the country for a nuclear reactor since 1978. Another four reactors—two in South Carolina and two in Florida—are up for approval this year.

8

CARIBOU AND YOU

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to designate an area half the size of Rhode Island in Idaho and Washington as critical habitat for endangered woodland caribou. Opponents decried the proposal as nothing more than a federal land grab that would harm their local economies by restricting logging, snowmobiling and use of the forest. A spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service told the Associated Press that the government is trying to save a herd of about 40 and the designation would have little impact on local residents. The animals have been on the endangered list since 1983. A final decision is expected in November.



9

NO TAX ON BOTOX

New Jersey lawmakers have voted to gradually phase out their state’s 6 percent tax on cosmetic surgery and elective procedures such as Botox injections over the next few years, according to National Public Radio. Garden State plastic surgeons are elated. They watched all their customers drive to neighboring states that don’t tax for their nips, tucks and lifts. The doctors also commissioned a study that showed the state was losing, rather than gaining, revenues because of the tax. The Legislature established the tax in 2006, expecting it to bring in around \$20 million a year. The state actually receives about half that amount.

10

DAM THE DISCHARGE!

Under the Clean Water Act, states may ask the EPA to designate a “no discharge zone” in which large vessels are prohibited from releasing sewage (even if treated) into the water. California lawmakers did so in 2010, after passing three laws in the previous four years to reduce the discharges to protect local aquatic life and public health, prevent beach closures, and support commercial fishing and crabbing. In February, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved the zone, which extends three miles out along the entire 1,624-mile coast. It will be monitored by the U.S. Coast Guard. The shipping industry will have to expand the size of its storage tanks to keep the estimated 22 million gallons of waste out of the shallow waters off the coast. Hawaii’s coastal waters and Washington’s Puget Sound could be next.