Success, it's been said, has many fathers, while failure is an unwanted orphan.

The Capitol experienced another failure this week – not for the first time, certainly, nor the last – when Gov. Jerry Brown called off talks with Republicans on placing billions of dollars in taxes before voters in June to balance the budget.

Adhering to the time-dishonored script for such situations, everyone involved is blaming everyone else for failure, and no one claims the orphan.

On the specifics of the issue, there's plenty of blame for all involved. But if we Californians want to place responsibility for our perpetual budget crisis where it truly belongs, we should look in the mirror.

The budget deficit is just one of many major public policy issues that fester year after year without resolution, and the underlying cause is an archaic political structure that is utterly divorced from California's social and economic reality.

Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger won the governorship in 2003, boasting that as an outsider without baggage, he could strong-arm a gridlocked Capitol to balance the budget and otherwise do the public's business. He failed.

Democrat Brown was elected governor in 2010, pledging that as a former governor with an insider's knowledge of the Capitol and no further ambitions, he could succeed where Schwarzenegger had failed. But so far, at least, he also has stumbled.

Their failures should tell us that there's a structural fault and that the identity of the governor or other purely political factors don't make much difference. Term limits, gerrymandered districts and supermajority vote requirements may play tangential roles, but the fundamental fault is structural.

We have a governmental structure that diffuses authority so broadly that it requires virtual unanimity on any major issue. And it collides with a California that's become so diverse and complex that it lacks consensus, much less unanimity, on any major issue.
As we voters become disgusted with failure in the Capitol, we tend to erect even more barriers to
decision-making, believing we are punishing political miscreants, but in reality we are punishing
ourselves with bad government.

We've built a wonderful system for gridlock and passing the buck, which is what's happening
now on the budget, but a terrible system for effective decision-making. And until we muster the
courage to change it and align government with reality we will continue to experience failure.

The good news is that the budget stalemate feeds a growing public awareness of California's
crisis of governance and provides new fodder for those who attempt to do something about it.

We must empower those we elect to office to make decisions and, just as importantly, hold them
accountable for those decisions.

We do neither now.

© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.