Political machinations over the state budget dominate every legislative session, but this year's version of the annual budget game may be particularly bizarre due to a confluence of unusual factors, to wit:

• Not only is it an election year, but incumbents and aspirants will be running in districts that have been altered, sometimes hugely, by the state's new redistricting commission.

• This is also the first year for a new election system in which the top two finishers in the June primary, regardless of party, will face each other in November.

• Legislators briefly lost their salaries last year when they failed to produce a balanced budget by the June 15 constitutional deadline, thanks to a 2010 ballot measure that also gave Democrats hegemony over the budget by eliminating the two-thirds budget vote requirement.

• The 2011-12 budget that Democrats eventually enacted was based on the miraculous assumption of an extra $4 billion in revenue. But most of the miracle money hasn't shown up, and spending is running billions of dollars over expectations, so the budget is already way out of balance.

• Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature's budget analyst are billions of dollars apart on revenue estimates for the rest of the 2011-12 fiscal year and all of 2012-13.

• Democrats are unwilling to deal with the deficit now, due both to election year jitters over spending cuts that would affect major constituent groups, and to the revenue uncertainty.

• Brown has proposed major policy changes in his new budget, including landmark overhauls of school finance, child care and welfare that have generated angst among constituent groups.

• Brown bases his 2012-13 budget on voter approval of increases in sales and income taxes in November, but proposes spending cut "triggers," mostly on schools, to be pulled should the taxes be rejected.

Majority Democrats should be acting now to narrow the looming deficit, but will delay big decisions at least until late May, when spending and revenue estimates will be revised. And
they'll probably wait until after the June 5 primary, so as to shield incumbents from casting budget votes that could backfire among primary voters.

The primary, however, is just 10 days before the June 15 constitutional deadline for a budget, and if the Democrats generate another pie-in-the-sky budget that doesn't pass the smell test, as they did last year, they could again run afoul of the constitutional restriction on their salaries.

Controller John Chiang dropped the salary hammer on lawmakers after Brown vetoed the Legislature's first budget as being imbalanced.

Legislative leaders are now suing Chiang, contending that he lacks the power to cut off salaries and that only the Legislature itself can determine whether it has met the deadline.