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## **Steve Wiegand: Different year, same yammering about California's budget deficit**

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It can be accurately – if indelicately – stated that history is sometimes like a big plate of beans: It repeats itself, often in a disagreeable manner.

This occurred to me earlier this week while rummaging through a box of newspaper clippings.

The stories were mostly from the 1980s, mostly written by me, and mostly concerning state politics and government.

Aside from the consistent brilliance of the writing, what struck me most was the similarity of the issues and circumstances with those of the current state government.

Take 1983. Then, there was a Republican governor, George Deukmejian. Now, there is a Republican (sort of) governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger. Then, the Legislature contained 72 Democrats, 47 Republicans and one independent. Now, the Legislature contains 73 Democrats, 47 Republicans and no independents.

Then, the state began the year with a gaping budget deficit; there was a protracted partisan fight over redistricting; the governor was promising to bring all sides together and find a solution to the state's water woes; there was a flap over legislative and constitutional officer pay raises; there was talk of solving the state's growing traffic mess by building more freeways, and the governor proposed addressing the overcrowded prison problem in part by letting some inmates out early.

Now, the state began the year yada yada yada ... you get the idea.

There is clearly nothing instructive in all this. We could conjure up the words of the philosopher George Santayana about those who can't remember the past being condemned to repeat it, but the only thing politicians pay less attention to than history is philosophy.

Still, as long as I have the 1983 clip folder, it might be marginally entertaining to look at the budget mess from 25 years ago as we prepare for this summer's budget festivities.

Faced with a \$1.5 billion hole in the budget he inherited when he took over the office from Jerry Brown, Deukmejian proposed filling it with \$750 million in cuts and "rolling over" \$750 million into the next fiscal year's budget.

"It's time to get serious" about the state's chronic budget mess," the Deukster said seriously.

He also repeatedly said he was adamantly opposed to tax increases but might consider closing some tax loopholes or making other adjustments in the tax system.

Eventually, the governor and legislators agreed to a mix of cuts, some tax increases they referred to by other names, rolling over part of the deficit – and a 1-cent sales tax increase trigger that would be pulled if tax revenues didn't meet expectations (they did).

The state's elected leaders then turned what passed for their attention to the looming new budget.

They did so with their usual sense of decorum. The governor called the Democrats' budget ideas "irresponsible and illegal," and his aides hung a banner outside his office suggesting the budget was being "held hostage."

In retaliation, the chairman of the Assembly Rules Committee banned the governor's top aides from parking in the lot under the Capitol.

A Fourth of July legislative committee meeting degenerated into a profanity-laced discussion over which lawmakers were or weren't drunk.

State worker paychecks, vendor payments and pensioner stipends were delayed.

Finally, Deukmejian signed a spending plan on July 21 after cutting it by \$1.1 billion. It ended what was then the longest budget impasse in state history.

"The governor is bringing in a new Dark Age in California," fumed state Senate Prez David Roberti.

But Roberti was wrong. There's nothing new about the political process in California.

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