

Doomed to red ink

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

Looking for a perfect example of why California is unlikely ever to have a balanced budget again until an initiative finally forces lawmakers to end their recklessness? Consider the reaction to a reported Republican proposal on education spending.

Under the GOP plan, education spending would go up 3.8 percent this fiscal year, from \$55.1 billion to \$57.2 billion. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Democratic leaders back spending of \$57.6 billion. So by any rational definition, what the Republicans are suggesting is a modest attempt to contain spending growth as part of an overall effort to bring spending in line with revenue.

Forget rationality from Democratic leaders. Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez said "Republicans are asking for cuts that are way too deep," and declared the GOP wanted to "eviscerate public education." But Republicans are not asking for spending cuts - just holding the increase to 3.8 percent. Likening this to evisceration - the removal of a vital or essential part of something - is goofy. But in a Capitol dominated by the California Teachers Association, alas, it's unsurprising.

Unfortunately, we can also forget rationality from the media. Here's how the Los Angeles Times headlined its piece on budget talks: "GOP plan: slash aid to schools? Educators say they are shocked as Democrats reveal a Republican plan to cut \$400 million to balance state's budget."

We know journalists have a reputation for struggling with math, but calling a 3.8 percent increase a "slash" in funding is absurd. Here's another key detail the Times left out: K-12 attendance is expected to decline this year.

What a sorry picture. When it comes to budget math, the CPAs are ignored in favor of the CTA. The signature-gathering campaign for a balanced-budget initiative can't start soon enough.

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