

## Federal Glover: Proposition 13, term limits deserve second look

By Federal Glover  
Guest Columnist

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THERE IS simply no gentle way to sugarcoat the state's deepening fiscal crisis. And there is therefore, no way to ease the dire predictions that are befalling our communities in our county.

Since the county's budget is so inextricably linked to the state budget, Contra Costa County is suffering the same budget woes as the state except that at this level of government, we see the faces of the people who will suffer, we hear the voices of the children, women, elderly, foster youth and the disabled. Unlike our state representatives, who do their work in Sacramento, the supervisors and our county staff are in direct contact with those most affected.

I have not seen anything like this in my life. Older members of our community might remember the Great Depression and thank goodness, we haven't reached that level yet.

It is not a pretty picture. In the last few months, the Board of Supervisors has trimmed \$150 million from the County budget. We've had to lay off hundreds of employees.

Yes, we've had to learn to do more with less but that doesn't mean we've become more efficient. It means late payments, slower response time to lesser crimes, huge caseloads for welfare workers, slower processing of code violations, delays in restaurant inspections, not enough Deputy District Attorneys to

prosecute misdemeanors and our Sheriff's Department has had to cut back on weekend and graveyard staffing,

And it will only get worse in the immediate future. In an attempt to solve the state's financial quagmire, the governor is recommending that the state take some of the money that is supposed to go to the counties. That would translate to another \$33 million loss to Contra Costa.

One of the more draconian measures proposed by the governor is to eliminate the Healthy Families Program. This successful and critically important program currently serves a million children in California, and with a two-to-one match in federal dollars recently reauthorized by President Barack Obama and Congress, the Healthy Family Program was poised to continue to be a central component of California's safety net for health care for children, in a cost-effective way for our state.

For our county, this proposal would impact 13,200 children and cost the county about \$15.5 million, two-thirds of which is federal money.

According to a Contra Costa Times story, the elimination of the CalWORKS program would impact 10,395 Contra Costa families that receive benefits. The action more than likely would shift those families onto general assistance, "increasing county costs from \$93,000 a month to \$5.3 million a month," according to Joe Valentine, employment and human services director."

To say we're in a tough spot doesn't do the situation justice. We've not been in this situation before so it's a whole new world that requires a new set of paradigms if we are to find a solution to the mess California — and our county — is in.

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needs to be modified. Besides California, only Arkansas and Rhode Island still have that archaic requirement introduced in 1934.

We have to question whether the current term limits is working. Yes, it brought in many new legislators but that made the amateur politicians putty in the hands of the special interests, the real power in Sacramento these days.

Finally, the third rail of California politics, Proposition 13, needs to be amended. Not abolished, mind you, but a revision. The passage of Prop. 13 in 1978 cured one ill but created a host of unintended new ones. Many critics say California's economic and educational system began to decline with that proposition's passage. Just ask yourself, can you honestly say we've had better state government since 1978?

It took the revenue away from local governments and gave it to the state.

You want more cops on the streets, potholes fixed, parks maintained or more teachers for your high school? Wait your turn behind the state health department, or the state prisons, or Caltrans.

I don't have a magic wand. I don't think the governor's solution is the answer either. All I know is that the state's budget quagmire, and as a result, the county's budget situation is going to hurt each and every one of us. And I'm afraid it's only going to get worse before the economy turns around.

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