

California prepares thousands of government layoffs

David Brown
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At the end of March, California's Democratic Governor Jerry Brown officially proposed his Government Reorganization Plan (GRP) to restructure the state government agencies. Under the guise of increasing "coordination and efficiency," he is preparing the destruction of thousands of jobs.

Brown sent his proposal to the "Little Hoover" Commission, an independent state oversight agency, on March 30. Under his plan the number of state agencies would be reduced from 12 to 10, through the combination and reorganization of existing agencies.

The Little Hoover Commission now has 30 days to issue recommendations to the governor and legislature. Unless opposed by a majority in either the State Assembly or Senate, the plan will go into effect 60 days after the legislature receives the commission's report.

Under the plan, three new agencies will be created to take the place of five old ones. Specifically the Agencies of Business, Transportation, and Housing; State and Consumer Services; Technology; Emergency Management; and The Volunteer Program will be incorporated into others including the new Agencies of Government Operations, Business and Consumer Services, and Transportation.

Although the governor's summary letter focuses on expected increases in efficiency by ensuring that related government programs are within the same agency, the real expected savings comes from eliminating 39 state entities and 9 government programs.

Among many others, the GRP will eliminate the Department of Mental Health, splitting its functions among several other departments. This cut is particularly disturbing after a study by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research in November of last year showed that nearly 2 million adults in California had mental health needs. Less than a quarter of them

were receiving minimally adequate treatment, and over half were receiving no treatment at all.

Another notable cut is the Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board, which is used by employers and employees to appeal decisions on unemployment insurance eligibility. Although the board receives only 0.5 percent of its budget from the state general fund, it is included in the GRP's cost-cutting measures to make it harder for the growing number of unemployed to collect benefits.

In total, the governor's budget including the GRP is expected to cut the state government's workforce by at least 3,000, as first outlined in the governor's budget proposal in January. Department of Finance Director Ana Matosantos said at the time that the goal was "reductions in positions."

Throughout the recession government employees have been targeted in order to close budget gaps at all levels. In February alone, 10,300 government jobs were cut, mostly from cities and counties. Since the beginning of the recession, government jobs in California have declined by 5 percent overall, with the majority of losses occurring at the local level.

In last year's budget proposal, Brown included both tax cuts for corporations in order to "create jobs," and budget cuts that resulted in thousands of government and school employees being laid off. Although this year's proposal doesn't include an explicit corporate tax cut, it follows the same basic principle.

The proposed layoffs go hand in hand with the governor's planned assault on public employee pensions. In both cases the driving force is not a desire to "increase efficiency," but to make the working class pay for the financial crisis.



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