

LATEXTRA

MONDAY, JULY 18, 2011 :: LATIMES.COM/LANOW

Advertisement

Buy today's deal at www.ladeals.com

Save on digitizing photos, movies & audio recordings

LADEALS.COM
Los Angeles Times



GARY FRIEDMAN Los Angeles Times

HEADING TO NEW HOSPITAL BUILDING

Theodora Stavroudis helps move 2-month-old Steven Paraedes to the high-tech, \$636-million building at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. Nearly 200 patients moved into the new wing in a delicate transfer process involving more than a year of planning. **AA3**

State levies fire fee on rural homes

A new law requires that homeowners who live in wildfire-prone areas pay \$150 a year for protection.

MICHAEL J. MISHAK
REPORTING FROM
SACRAMENTO

As Californians have crowded the state's bucolic foothills and scenic mountains with subdivisions and cabin retreats, pushing further into the combustible wild, state firefighting has become a billion-dollar enterprise.

Now, with the state continuing to lurch from one fiscal crisis to another, Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature are pushing back.

They are requiring rural homeowners who rely on state firefighters to pay a \$150 annual fee for fire-prevention services. Lawmakers are mulling over whether to revive proposed land-use restrictions that were killed just three years ago, after fierce objections from developers and local officials. And Brown has directed the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to study how the state manages and pays for fires in those zones — and whether local governments should shoulder more of that responsibility.

Brown has said that the cash-strapped state can no longer afford the entire cost of battling blazes in fire-prone areas. The new fee could raise as much as \$200 million a year from the more than 846,000 homeowners who live within more than 31 million acres of "state responsibility areas," where Cal Fire is the primary responder.

A spokesman for the governor said the levy will "ensure that landowners in these areas that receive a disproportionate benefit from Cal Fire's services pay an appropriate portion of the state's wildland firefighting costs."

Experts say the fire fee, if it survives threatened court challenges from taxpayer groups, marks a significant, if small, shift in California's approach to wildland development. Still, better management of growth in fire-hazard regions, they said, will take stronger planning measures, including man-

[See Fire AA4]

DEBT TALKS KEEP GOING

No breakthrough is reported between the White House and congressional leaders. Tempers have cooled.

LISA MASCARO
AND CHRISTI PARSONS
REPORTING FROM
WASHINGTON

Hoping to break the impasse over the nation's debt limit, White House and congressional leaders and aides continued their private discussions Sunday to exchange possible proposals to keep the government from defaulting on its bills.

Senate leaders have shaped the outline of a compromise that would attach as much as \$1.5 trillion largely in spending reductions to a debt ceiling increase, and establish a new congressional committee to present further cuts for a vote by year's end. Other ideas also were being considered.

No signs emerged that the negotiations were as contentious as last week, when tempers sometimes flared. But no immediate breakthrough was apparent.

"There have been a lot of conversations going on, and they will continue," Jacob Lew, director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, said on CNN's "State of the Union."

Congress has been "figuring out what it could do," Lew added on NBC's "Meet the Press." "That will continue over the next day or so."

President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden participated in the private discussions, which took place all weekend, the White House said.

Obama had given congressional leaders until this weekend to return from their party caucuses with components of a debt-reduction plan they could support.

House Speaker John A. Boehner's office said there was nothing new to report.

"Meetings have been occurring, ideas are being exchanged and scenarios are being discussed," said Boehner's spokesman, Michael Steel. "We are keeping the lines of communication open with all parties."

[See Debt, AA2]

When to move students on?

L.A. school board revamping policy that bars social promotion

HOWARD BLUME

The nation's second-largest school district officially launched itself once more into an ongoing national debate over social promotion, the practice of moving students to the next grade even when they're academically unprepared.

The Los Angeles Board of Education agreed last week to begin revamping a policy that bars the advancement of unqualified students to the next grade. The rules have been loosely enforced. One proposal is to focus more intensively on struggling students in grades three, five and seven, considered key transition years.

"Having a child repeat the same grade the same way doesn't produce stellar results," said board member Tamar Galatzan, who proposed the board action. "Making sure that students have learned the material when they move from grade to grade is something this district needs to do a better job of."

The issue was to have been settled in 1998, when a state law was passed requiring school districts to retain students who don't meet academic requirements.

Despite the law, California students continue to be moved along, regardless of

academic achievement.

In the Los Angeles Unified School District, for example, only a small percentage are held back, although, according to state test results, large numbers perform well below grade level.

After the state law passed, local education officials debated who should be held back, when and why.

And they worried about angry parents and overcrowded classrooms. These fears did not materialize, although classrooms have remained crowded for other reasons. Meanwhile, the focus on how to improve academic achievement shifted elsewhere.

The issue of social promotion arises cyclically

nationwide, especially in large, low-performing urban districts.

In New York City, ending social promotion has been a tenet of reforms advanced by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. There is debate over how thoroughly the policy has been enforced and over its effectiveness.

[See Schools, AA5]

9th Circuit reversed again

U.S. Supreme Court overrules appellate judges in 19 of 26 cases from its last term.

CAROL J. WILLIAMS

It was another bruising year for the liberal judges of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals as the Supreme Court overturned the majority of their decisions, at times sharply criticizing their legal reasoning.

Appeals from the nine Western states of the circuit dominated the high court's docket, as usual, supplying more than 30% of the 84 cases taken up by the justices during the term that



ERIC RISBERG Associated Press

OPINIONS: Judge Stephen Reinhardt is among the circuit's liberals.

ended last month.

The Supreme Court reversed or vacated 19 of the 26 decisions it looked at from the 9th Circuit this judicial term, issuing especially

pointed critiques of the court's handling of cases involving prisoners' rights and death row reprieves.

Although the proportion of reversals was relatively in line with past years and other appellate circuits across the country, the 9th Circuit was often out of step even with the high court's liberal justices, who joined with the conservatives in 12 unanimous rulings.

In their reversals, the justices often expressed impatience with what they see as stubborn refusal by the lower court to follow Supreme Court precedent. One of the circuit's most renowned liberals, Judge Stephen Reinhardt, was seen by judicial analysts as the main

[See 9th Circuit, AA4]



GINA FERAZZI Los Angeles Times

Little Tokyo goes back to the drawing board

The just-concluded Design Week festival showcased Japan's cutting-edge design, technology and pop culture. Organizers hope the event will inspire a younger, multiethnic crowd to visit and revitalize the enclave. **AA3**

Freed Casey Anthony goes into hiding

A lawyer for her parents says they rejected their daughter's idea of using them as a decoy during her release. **AA2**

Prayer policy is still divisive

A court ruling that allows Lancaster to open council meetings with an invocation may not end the controversy. **AA3**

Ex-Uruguayan dictator dies

Juan Maria Bordaberry's years in power were marked by a wave of disappearances, torture and killings. **AA5**

Complete index.....AA2
Lottery.....AA2
California.....AA3
Obituaries.....AA5

Weather: Sunny and warmer. Downtown Los Angeles: 81/66. **AA8**