

Opinion: State budget is more bitter than sweet

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Judged purely on the straitjacket they've been forced to wear, Democrats were on their way Tuesday toward making the best of some bad budget choices.

Yet judged on California's needs and ambitions, there isn't much to celebrate. Our standing as a state that invests in its future and protects its most vulnerable is about to take a horrible beating.

It could have turned out differently. Republicans and Democrats could have found common ground on a combination of spending cuts, budget reforms and tax extensions. They could have acted like true public servants.

Yet all the posturing and no-tax pledges and pressure from vested interests poisoned whatever common ground might have existed. This week, Gov. Jerry Brown and his party decided there was no deal to be cut with GOP lawmakers, whose votes were needed for tax extensions. So Democrats came up with a Plan B that cut the minority out of the action. Republicans gained nothing – no pension reforms, no regulatory reforms, no spending cap – even though their constituents will share in the pain.

It is ugliness heaped upon ugliness. More cuts to higher education, driving up tuition costs. More cuts to Healthy Families. Less help for children whose parents are trying to find jobs. Less help for the developmentally disabled. More cuts to the judiciary. The list goes on and on.

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