

California government unions move to squeeze out private contractors

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

With California facing yet another budget crisis that threatens state jobs and pay, employee unions are moving on several fronts to push use of civil service workers instead of private contractors for state government work.

Unions had a say in Gov. Jerry Brown's 2012-13 budget revision last month, which proposes axing outside contracting for a range of work, from computer consulting to custodial services.

State employee unions also threw their weight behind recent legislation that, among other things, would have given civil service employees first crack at all state government jobs. The measure failed but is likely to resurface.

Last month, the state attorneys' union successfully contested a multimillion-dollar contract with a private law firm for legal services.

"We've got a bunch more (cases) in the pipeline," said Patrick Whalen, general counsel for California Attorneys, Administrative Law Judges and Hearing Officers in State Employment, or CASE. "When it's crunch time, you look for every penny you can."

The union efforts have intensified the debate over privatizing government functions, especially with California confronting a budget deficit of at least \$15.7 billion through June 2013. Brown has suggested closing some of that gap by eliminating thousands of state jobs next year and putting roughly 214,000 employees on a four-day workweek schedule that would cut their

pay by 5 percent.

In that same vein, Brown and labor leaders say curbing what the state spends on contractors would save money.

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