

Opinion: California has half a budget at best

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

So does California have a new state budget, or not?

It has about a half-a-budget, or perhaps more accurately, a half-baked budget.

The Legislature passed a budget bill last Friday, thus meeting the constitutional deadline and also preserving lawmakers' salaries, along with a handful of minor "trailer bills" to implement its provisions.

However, the budget bill also requires Gov. Jerry Brown's signature, and he has until June 27 to sign or, as he did last year, veto it.

There's also a flock of other trailer bills still pending, including those that involve Brown's dispute with his fellow Democrats in the Legislature over health and welfare services.

The Democrats would spend roughly a billion dollars more on those services than Brown insists he wants, covering the extra spending by slashing the budget's emergency reserve in half and adopting some rosy revenue assumptions.

Whether the intraparty conflict is genuine, or is merely a bit of political theater to portray Brown as being tough with the voting public's bucks, is at least debatable.

Certainly, the governor has been trying mightily to create an image of frugality to persuade voters to pass his sales and income tax hike next November.

Speaking of which, Brown has about three weeks until the deadline for his tax measure to qualify for the ballot and

there's at least a small doubt that the signature-sampling now under way will be successful.

If it isn't, all bets are off.

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