

# Brown calls for lofty goals in California

By Normitsu Onishi, New York Times

SACRAMENTO – Emboldened by a brighter fiscal horizon, Gov. Jerry Brown on Thursday recommitted himself to two ambitious projects, a high-speed rail line and a huge water tunnel system, in an optimistic State of the State speech that sought to secure California’s long-term future as well as the three-term governor’s legacy.

Grasping at California’s vision of itself as a land of opportunity and a model for the rest of the nation, Brown said the state was rebounding financially after a difficult period. In a speech citing sources as varied as the Bible, Montaigne and Yeats, Brown said the state’s budget was now sound, but he also warned of profligacy, a remark that seemed directed at the Democratic lawmakers listening to him in the State Capitol here.

“The message this year is clear: California has once again confounded our critics. We have wrought in just two years a solid and enduring budget,” Brown, a Democrat, said in his third State of the State address since returning to office in 2011. “Against those who take pleasure, singing of our demise, California did the impossible.”

Brown spoke of wanting to reform school financing by empowering local school districts, and of continuing to lead efforts to fight climate change, like the cap-and-trade system for carbon emissions that went into effect recently.

Recalling the big infrastructure projects in the state’s past, Brown also voiced strong support for two big-ticket items that have drawn strong opposition: a bullet train that would eventually link Los Angeles and the Bay Area, and two tunnels

that would funnel water directly from Northern California to more populated areas in the south.

“The London Olympics lasted a short while and cost \$14 billion, about the same cost as this project,” he said of the tunnels. “But this project will serve California for hundreds of years.”

Brown’s speech came at what many are describing as a turning point for California after years of economic turmoil. The state’s economy is continuing to show signs of strengthening, with job growth and a housing market revival.

Fiscally, after years of ballooning budget deficits, the state is now projecting a balanced budget. In November, Brown surprised many by winning a hard-fought campaign to pass Proposition 30, a temporary tax surcharge that will pour \$6 billion a year into the state treasury for the next seven years.

Still, Brown has repeatedly warned about the need to control spending. With Democrats now having supermajorities in the Senate and the Assembly, they can pass tax increases unilaterally. As experts predict that Democratic legislators will face pressure to increase spending, many are now describing Brown, long known as “Governor Moonbeam” for his eccentricities, as the only adult in the room.

Citing the story of Genesis and Pharaoh’s dream of seven cows, he said: “The people have given us seven years of extra taxes. Let us follow the wisdom of Joseph, pay down our debts and store up reserves against the leaner times that will surely come.”

In interviews, Brown, who served two terms as governor from 1975 to 1983, has brushed aside talk of his legacy. But in recent months, Brown, 74, who was treated recently for prostate cancer, has spoken about his mortality, mentioning the death of a close friend.

"This is my 11th year in the job, and I have never been more excited," he said.