

Calif. projects years of budget surpluses

By David Siders and Jim Miller, Sacramento Bee

In its most optimistic budget forecast in more than a decade, the Legislature's fiscal analyst said Wednesday that California is poised for years of multibillion-dollar surpluses.

However, even a moderate economic downturn could throw the state back into deficit, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office said. The analyst projected a \$5.6 billion surplus by June 2015 and urged lawmakers to hold much of it in reserve.

The fiscal outlook is a prelude to annual budget negotiations at the Capitol, where the expectation of a surplus will foist pressure on Democratic lawmakers to increase spending in budget talks next year. Many social service advocates limped out of the recession desperate to restore or expand programs for California's poorest and neediest residents, and despite modest spending increases many of their funding requests remain unfulfilled.

"There were many things cut that need to be restored," said Anthony Wright, director of the nonprofit advocacy group Health Access California. "We had cut the safety net beyond the pale. ... We started to restore this past year, but only at the margins, and more needs to be done."

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