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EDITORIAL

## Albany and the Budget

Gov. David Paterson of New York has commanded the Legislature to return on Tuesday. Fixing the budget must be their top priority. The state is in a fiscal crisis. There is no other word for it.

The facts are these: Revenues are down about 20 percent; expenses are rising. And dreams that the good times will suddenly come roaring back are just dreams. Unless the Legislature can cut \$3.2 billion from the state's operating budget by the end of the fiscal year, next year's deficit could reach \$10 billion.

There are, of course, other important matters that must be addressed. The secretive authorities that do much of the state's building and borrowing are badly in need of reform. The right to same-sex marriage in New York is long overdue. Mr. Paterson's proposal for a new, less costly pension plan for new state employees deserves attention as does his proposal to tighten controls on a state budget that expands even in the worst of times, like these.

But Albany's toughest and most important job right now is to make certain that New York does not become another California, running out of cash, paying bills with i.o.u.'s and watching state credit ratings deteriorate.

The governor's proposals are not pretty. Most agencies would lose 11 percent of whatever they expected to get over the next five months, except for education financing, which would drop 5 percent. And the numbers attached to some of Mr. Paterson's revenue-raising proposals need a more rigorous look, including a tax amnesty that his aides say could bring in \$250 million in unpaid taxes or the Aqueduct raceway contract that might add \$200 million.

The Legislature has been largely barren of new ideas. What it must do is work with the governor. If it refuses to do so, New Yorkers can legitimately add fiscal dysfunction — the inability to deal with economic reality — to the list of Albany's many flaws.

Some legislators who don't want to make any hard choices say that they have heard these alarms before, and that if they just wait, the crisis will resolve itself. They are deluding themselves. If they won't act now, we will all pay the price.

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