

EDITORIALS & LETTERS

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Political shell games

Re "Bill of goods" (Our Opinions, Aug. 24):

That legislators decided to split hairs should be of no surprise to anyone, since the California Legislature has a history of similar shell games. My favorite is the one where a legislator can have his or her vote changed on a bill so long as that change does not affect the outcome of the original vote. This way a legislator can look a constituent in the eye and, with a straight face, say that he or she either did or didn't vote for a controversial bill and pretend that the original, real vote didn't count.

Welcome to the "Wonderland" that is California; one can only imagine what the Mad Hatters will dream up for us next.

— **Geneviève M. Clavreul**
Pasadena

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our opinions

Bill of goods

“YES ON 1A STOPS OUR EXISTING GAS TAXES FROM BEING USED FOR OTHER PROJECTS.”

That, jarring capital letters and all, is a direct quote from Proposition 1A, which California voters approved last fall along with four infrastructure bonds.

The argument for Proposition 1A also told us that the measure “closes the loophole in the law and ensures that the gas taxes you *already* pay are spent only on transportation projects benefiting California’s 20 million drivers.”

That was the line.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the state’s legislative leaders knew voters would be reluctant to approve \$40 billion in bonds, for fear that Sacramento would stop funding basic infrastructure needs from the general fund. Proposition 1A was designed to alleviate those fears, and it worked.

That is, it worked until state leaders signed off on a new budget plan this week that siphons \$1.3 billion, or 40 percent, of gas sales-tax funds away from transit projects.

So much for the lofty promises of Proposition 1A.

It turns out state leaders were able to seize on a technicality — gas taxes aren’t the same thing as gas *sales* taxes — and funnel money away from transportation, just as they always have.

Never mind that that \$1.3 bil-

lion came from “spillover” gas-tax revenues — money generated when gas prices rise faster than inflation. Under a 1971 law, spillover money is supposed to pay for public transit projects.

But with a little book-cooking and legalistic phrasing, the politicians were able to find a way around that law, as well as the plain assurances of Proposition 1A.

Now last year’s infrastructure bonds are Sacramento’s very justification for slashing desperately needed transit funding. The politicians reason that because bond revenue will help pay for congestion relief, they don’t have to do their part.

“They’re basically saying to us that since you got Proposition 1B money, you can use that money instead,” explains Michael Turner, government-relations manager for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The cuts will cost Los Angeles County about \$336 million. Without those funds, critical local transportation projects are in jeopardy. That includes extending the Orange Line busway from Warner Center to Chatsworth, widening the Golden State Freeway at the Orange County Line, bus operations and the Exposition Light Rail project.

The state’s leaders have sold us a lie — once again. They get the money, and all we get to show for it is dismal, crumbling infrastructure.

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