

Political Notebook

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Indy Arambula hires his own budget guru

Newly declared Independent Juan Arambula says he still gets invited to Democratic caucus meetings. But the Fresno lawmaker wants his own advice on the state budget that is, well, independent.

So he's paying his own numbers cruncher, Tim Gage, a former Department of Finance director for former Gov. Gray Davis.

"I want an independent analysis and I have the money and I have the need," Arambula said.

Technically Gage was hired by the California Issues Forum, a nonprofit affiliated with the Legislature's moderate caucus, an informal group of like-minded Democrats.

Arambula said he's giving some of his campaign money to the forum to help pay for Gage, whom Arambula estimated will make \$10,000 in his first month of service.

Arambula severed ties with the Democratic Party in late June after growing increasingly frustrated with a party that, in his view, bends to the will of public employee unions. He said he wants Gage to review what he thinks could be overly optimistic budget estimates by Democrats and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

For instance, the governor and Democrats propose selling a portion of the [State Compensation Insurance Fund](#) to generate \$1 billion. Arambula suspects that could be an overly rosy estimate, he said.

Gage will have to work fast. Lawmakers and the governor are expected to huddle this afternoon in an attempt to finalize a deal to close the state's \$26 billion budget gap.

Assembly Republican Leader Sam Blakeslee said in an interview earlier today that there's a "decent possibility" of closing the budget deal today with a possible vote on Monday.

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