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GOVERNOR'S CONCILIATORY SPEECH RECEIVES MIXED RESPONSE

01/05/06 9:25 PST

Heads nodded in agreement with many of the priorities outlined in Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's State of the State address this evening, including transportation, education and a minimum wage increase, but hesitations abounded regarding the plan's funding and execution.

"I am encouraged that the governor appears to be moving away from partisan politics and towards collaboration on transportation and other vital infrastructure investments," San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom said in a statement.

"However, the devil is always in the details and, so far, many of the details are still to come," he said.

The governor's plan, which Schwarzenegger called "a strategic growth plan for California's future," involves spending more than \$222 billion on infrastructure over the next 10 years without raising taxes. The plan relies on \$68 billion in new bonds over the next decade.

Caltrans Director Will Kempton called the governor's initiative "bold."

"Infrastructure is vital to our economy and quality of life," Kempton said. "The governor's Strategic Growth Plan will significantly reduce congestion on the state's transportation system for California motorists."

Many said the focus on the state's infrastructure is long overdue.

"While the scale of what the governor is proposing in infrastructure investment may seem ambitious, it is really the least that we can afford to do to begin closing the gap created by years of disinvestment and procrastination," said Doug Aadland, chairman of the transportation advocacy group Transportation California.

Assembly Speaker Pro Tem Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, said the governor's message of cooperation tonight was the result of his special election flop in November.

"The people of California made it loud and clear in the special election that they want the governor to work with the Legislature," Yee said. "The governor finally seems ready to join parents and teachers by fully funding education."

Yee also expressed skepticism. "We did not hear many specifics tonight, other than

bonds and more debt," he said. "We cannot allow our children to inherit a multi-billion dollar burden."

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell said he was heartened by the governor's emphasis on education. "Clearly, the governor heard the people of California and there is real hope that we will make up for lost time and have a productive and successful 2006," he said.

"Building and modernizing our classrooms is certainly a critical part of investing in our future," O'Connell said.

Art Pulaski, executive secretary-treasurer of the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, said Schwarzenegger's plan consists of "half solutions."

"The governor's proposal to rebuild California's crumbling infrastructure -- highways, roads, ports, hospitals and schools -- is a positive step to grow our economy and improve our quality of life," he said. "But we must diversify and expand our tax base to avoid saddling our children and grandchildren with insurmountable debt."

Terry Connelly, dean of the Ageno School of Business at Golden Gate University, called the conciliatory speech a graceful U-turn.

Connelly said he was impressed in particular with the portion of the speech that focused on China. "The governor's identification with China was insightful," he said. "Very smart."

"California is very well-positioned to benefit from China's growth," he said.

State Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, is looking forward to Schwarzenegger's words translating into action.

"We all know this is an election year, but we still have a window to get some big stuff done before the usual bickering starts," he said.

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