

# Editorial: Water, health care bills are still missing in action

**Mercury News Editorial**  
**San Jose Mercury News**

Article Launched: 10/16/2007 01:34:38 AM PDT

Pardon us if we stifle a yawn while reviewing the list of 965 bills Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed, vetoed or let become law Sunday, concluding the regular legislative year. After all, the biggest issues - health care and water - remain undecided despite a 4-week-old special session.

Still, a handful of bills stand out as worthy of recognition.

## Health, human services

The governor showed compassion for injured workers and foster children. But not for the plight of the mentally ill.

California's workers' compensation reforms are working better than hoped. But the benefits for temporarily disabled workers are lacking. The governor's signing of a bill by San Jose Assemblyman Joe Coto will help get injured workers back on the job.

Also getting help are foster children with physical and mental disorders, who will remain eligible for Supplemental Security Income as they make the transition into college or the job market.

But the governor's treatment of the mentally ill is inexcusable. He vetoed San Jose Assemblyman Jim Beall's bill that would have ensured that people with mental disorders would be provided with the same level of health care coverage as that offered for other illnesses, as they deserve.

## Education

This was not a big year for education legislation. However, we are disappointed with Schwarzenegger's veto of a minor bill of major importance for Franklin-McKinley School District. It would have allowed district eighth-graders to be able to take - and pass - the math portion of the high school exit exam. Doing so would be a source of pride and motivation in the largely low-income district. But the governor sided with the bureaucracy and conformity.

## Crime, courts and guns

Schwarzenegger showed that he has the courage to cross the National Rifle Association but not law-and-order conservatives.

The gun lobby opposed two bills that he signed. One will protect the endangered California condor by banning lead bullets in areas that the majestic bird inhabits. The other will help police track down criminals by requiring that semiautomatic pistols stamp a serial number on each cartridge fired. California will be the first state to require micro-stamping.

But for the second year, a misguided Schwarzenegger vetoed modest bills to address primary causes of wrongful convictions. The bills would have required the police to tape some jailhouse interrogations and would have put tighter controls on testimony from jailhouse snitches and photo lineups. Until there's a governor willing to confront bad prosecution practices, every Californian remains at risk.

## Environment

Schwarzenegger made decent progress in specific areas such as energy efficiency, cleaner air, flood control and ocean protection.

It was disappointing that he gave a thumbs-down to three "green building" laws that would have encouraged or set higher environmental standards for buildings, the source of nearly 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Schwarzenegger argued that building codes shouldn't be set by statutes.

Alternative energy got a boost with the signing of a bill to increase car registration and smog abatement fees, raising \$200 million a year for putting cleaner cars on the road and research into alternative fuels. And he approved the creation of \$250

million in annual rebates for installing solar water heaters, a much-needed boost for a long overlooked area.

He also advanced the cause of clean air by signing a measure to strengthen enforcement of diesel emission control rules for heavy-duty vehicles.

Schwarzenegger gave environmentalists a pleasant surprise by signing a first-in-the-nation law banning the use of phthalates, a plastics softener, in toys for children under age 3. The chemicals have been linked to hormonal problems, early puberty and genital defects.

But the success or failure of the 2007 legislative session will ultimately rest on the ability of the governor and legislative leaders to hammer out an agreement on water and health care. And that looks doubtful.

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