

# Davis signs bill helping braceros collect wages

Farmworkers will have more time to file legal action under measure.

By **LOUISE CHU**

The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — Aiding the half-century struggle of Mexican farmworkers to recover their lost wages, Gov. Gray Davis signed a bill Sunday that will give them more time to file legal action for payment.

The bill, by Assemblyman Marco Firebaugh, D-Los Angeles, extends the statute of limitations for claims until Dec. 31, 2005. The new law is intended to help braceros, which include more

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Sculpture honoring braceros unveiled in Stockton. **A2**

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The Bakersfield Californian

Numerous Kern County residents could be affected by legislation allowing more time for braceros to pursue wages withheld from 1942 to 1950.

Braceros are Mexican farm and railroad workers who came to the United States to ease a wartime labor shortage.

Reyes Baltazar, 65, of Bakersfield is among a local group of braceros who have been trying to recoup pay they never received.

"We think it's a good thing, because it gives the people fighting for this more time to figure out what they can do," Baltazar said in Spanish about the new legislation, according to translation by his 17-year-old son, Rodney Baltazar.

Reyes Baltazar also said he plans on following through with the effort until he sees results.

# BRACEROS: Separate bill clarifies immigrant worker rights

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than 300,000 Mexican farmworkers who were contracted by the U.S. government to relieve the labor shortage during World War II.

"It's an outrage that many braceros who worked in California during a national time of need have never been paid for their labor," Davis said in a statement released Sunday. "This bill will help pay a long-overdue debt."

The labor agreement between the U.S. and Mexican governments required a portion of the braceros' wages to be withheld as a savings fund, to be paid upon their return to Mexico.

But many never received the pay-

ment. A number of braceros never knew about the money owed to them, while others tried to claim it but could not get through the bureaucracy.

Braceros and their heirs filed a class-action lawsuit in March 2001 against the U.S. and Mexican governments and Wells Fargo Bank for mismanaging the funds. Experts have estimated that the 10 percent of wages withheld between 1942 and 1950 could now total up to \$1 billion, including interest.

Davis also signed a bill Sunday, clarifying the state's position on worker rights in relation to immigration status.

The bill, by Sen. Gloria Romero, D-Los Angeles, ensures that all protec-

tions, rights and remedies available under state law are available to California workers, regardless of their immigration status, except those prohibited under federal law.

The bill was written in response to a recent Supreme Court case, in which a company tried to deny a former employee back pay because he was an undocumented immigrant. But the Supreme Court ruled that the company violated federal labor laws and awarded the back pay.

Romero's bill is intended to clarify the state's position on the workers' labor rights, depending on immigration status.