

BAK. CA. 10-1-02

Undocumented driver's license bill vetoed

From staff and wire reports

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Gray Davis vetoed legislation letting some illegal immigrants obtain California driver's licenses.

The long-awaited announcement came as Davis signed and killed a flood of last-minute bills Monday night, including some that could have significant political consequences for the governor, a Democrat who is seeking re-election next month.

In addition to the license bill, he signed a measure to limit the weight of textbooks that students lug in backpacks and a series of laws to improve California's medical oversight, including allowing the publication of doctors' malpractice settlements in some cases.

He vetoed the controversial immigrant driver's license bill, a bill that would help American Indians protect tribal land and a bill allowing insurance companies to charge higher premiums to drivers who had a lapse in coverage. He also vetoed a bill that would have moved California's

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primary from March to June and a measure that would have placed strict limits on disposal of waste from decommissioned nuclear sites.

Most of the bills signed by Davis in recent days will go into effect Jan. 1, and bills not signed or vetoed become law automatically.

The farmworker and driver's license bills were among the most anticipated as a midnight deadline drew near.

The politically risky driver's license bill forced Davis to weigh what he said were increased security risks from licensing non-citizens after last year's terrorist attacks against the urging of immigrant rights groups that said it would make California's highways safer.

The governor's veto was greeted with sadness by Kern County immigration activists, who fought for driver's licenses, even though they found the proposed restrictions distasteful.

"It's very important for people in the process of becoming legal residents to have driver's licenses, but it's also important for Californians as a whole," said Roberto de la Rosa, executive director of the Ola Raza immigrant rights centers in Bakersfield, Porterville and Visalia.

Supporters said all California drivers would benefit by allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain the licenses they need to get auto insurance.

Meanwhile, Davis also signed a bill Monday to make public doctors' med-

ical malpractice settlements, if the physician has had three or more settlements of more than \$30,000 within the last decade.

The bill, by Liz Figueroa, D-Fremont, also adds two additional public members to the Medical Board of California, establishes an independent monitor to evaluate the board's enforcement and increases the penalty for unlicensed practice of medicine.

Physicians had opposed the public disclosure, saying malpractice settlements are often made out of convenience, not because the doctor is incompetent.

Davis also signed a bill Monday that requires the State Board of Education to adopt maximum weight standards for elementary and secondary school textbooks to help reduce backpack strain.

Assemblyman Rod Pacheco, R-Riverside, introduced the measure, saying students who carry heavy backpacks can develop spinal problems.

And Davis signed a measure creating a criminal penalty for misusing proprietary information from state agencies or the California Independent Operator.

That bill, by Assemblyman Kevin Shelley, D-San Francisco, was inspired by hearings held this summer about whether Texas-based Perot Systems misused sensitive information it gained through working with the California Independent System Operator.