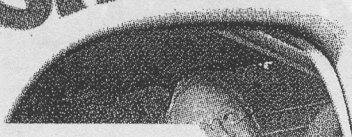


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Davis approves farm-worker bills

By Jim Wasserman

The Associated Press

Gov. Gray Davis, choosing between bitter opponents in one of the most controversial calls of the 2002 legislative session, has signed bills offering mediation to California farm workers in labor disputes with farmers.

The governor's action capped months of political rallies that included a farm-worker march through the Central Valley to Sacramento and a weeks-long vigil by farm workers and their supporters at the Capitol.

California's seasonal farm workers say the bills will help them get the larger paychecks, health care and other benefits typically given to workers in other industries.

A group of about 50 who have sat vigil outside the state Capitol for weeks broke out in loud

At a glance

A roundup of bills that Gov. Gray Davis signed and vetoed Monday. **Page A4**

cheers and hugged and kissed as Davis staffers announced on the Capitol lawn that he had signed the bill.

Juanita Ontiveros, the chairwoman of the UFW support committee for Northern California, called the signing "such wonderful news."

The farm workers "see a road to justice with this. They see that finally there is hope," she said.

Farm groups offered a different view.

"Our members are shocked and angered that the Legislature

has passed and the governor has signed into law legislation so patently illegal and potentially destructive to the California farmer," said Tom Nassif, president of the Western Growers Association. "This at a time when our industry is under attack by a flood of foreign imports and a weak farm economy."

The association's governmental affairs counsel, Mike Webb, said farm groups will almost certainly sue to overturn the new law.

Davis called the bills "a truly historic effort," adding that "the bottom line is that too many people who were supposed to benefit from the protections of the ARLA (Agricultural Relations Labor Act) are left without a contract, without a remedy and

See BILLS on A8