



Tidbits from Sacramento

Griffin & Associates
Legislative and Governmental Advocacy
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THE LEGISLATURE ADJOURNED OR DID IT?

It was a very short-lived adjournment. Many legislators had scheduled vacations and other plans based upon the scheduled adjournment which was to last until January, 2008. However, given the over 50 days of budget delay, it was clear that two major issues were not going to be addressed in the short time remaining prior to the scheduled adjournment September 11. During the last day of the session, the Governor signed the appropriate documents and called for two Special Sessions. The first Special Session is expected to focus on the development of a comprehensive water plan for California. The second Special Session is to health care reform.

California Water

Water has always been a subject of controversy in California. Remember the last major attempt to bring water from Northern California to Southern California by way of the infamous peripheral canal? It was stopped in its tracks by a 1982 ballot measure. Nothing has changed since except that we have more people in California now and more concerns about our adequacy of water supplies for agriculture and for drinking

The source of our natural water reservoirs has been the winter snow packs. However, the snow packs have been declining significantly in the last few years. Combine the declining snow pack for water reservoir storage with the increasing growth of California's population and many believe it spells a disaster waiting to happen.

There have been mixed bits of information coming from the Capitol in the last couple of weeks. It appears that trying to find an equitable water plan may not be as easy to produce as some had hoped. Recent rumbles from the Capitol indicate that solutions may not be reached quickly. This resolution is taking more time than anticipated.

Health Care

Health care reform has been on the front burner since January. However, despite some bills that were introduced to address health care reform and/or parts of it, little was passed by the legislature. AB 8, a compromise by Senate Pro-Tem Don Perata and Speaker Nunez was passed on a partisan vote and was sent to the Governor, but the outcome was pre-ordained. It will be vetoed. However, it was a good topic for discussion and debate.

Recent rumors indicate that some progress is being made with regard to determining how to structure health care policy. A number of key staff from all sides of the political spectrum are trying to craft acceptable language for a legislative bill. Until the language is released it is difficult to know exactly what mandates and policies will be included in the compromise proposal. Even then, I expect that the “devil” will be in the details.

A funding mechanism for any health care reform proposal is not expected to be included in the legislative proposal. That will remove one of the major stumbling blocks to reaching any compromise. Rather, it is expected that a ballot initiative will be proposed to the voters most likely in the June or November elections. The voters will decide whether or not to use state funds or perhaps a one-cent sales tax to cover the costs of health care for those unable to purchase insurance. Other mechanisms may also be included.

The one issue the public, the legislature and the Governor all agree upon is that our health care system is broken. Time will tell if the Special Session called by the Governor will break through all the rhetoric and come up with a viable health care reform proposal that will receive the required legislative votes and be signed into law. That is step one. Step two will be approval of the funding mechanism without which there is no health care reform.

LEGISLATION UPDATE

The 2007 regular Legislative Session closed on September 11th (the Assembly actually closed about 3:30 a.m. on the 12th). Hundreds of bills were passed and sent to the Governor for his signature or veto. The Governor has 30 days from the close of the session to decide what action to take on these bills. The following are some of the key bills I have been following.

AB 1 (Laird) This bill is the children’s health care bill. It is currently being held in the Assembly, for concurrence. This is a viable bill, but it is clearly being held to be used, if needed in the HealthCare Reform Special Session. However, it can also be sent to the Governor in January if there is not a compromise on healthcare reform.

AB 2 (Dymally). This bill would extend one of MRMIP programs. It is being held in the Senate Rules Committee. This may also be there as a result of the Special Session on HealthCare Reform.

AB 8 (Nunez/Perata) – This is the compromise healthcare reform bill the two Democratic leaders put together toward the end of session. It is currently in the Assembly and was expected to be sent to the Governor. However, it was held in the Assembly for concurrence in Senate amendments. The Governor had promised to veto this bill should it be sent to him. It is being held as another vehicle should healthcare reform not materialize in the Special Session.

AB 16 (Hernandez) – This was one of the 3 immunization bills we have been following. This bill was sent to the Senate Rules Committee – No further action will be taken on this bill this year. It may be amended further next year.

AB 106 (Berg) – This bill would ensure patients 65 and older were offered flu and pneumonia immunizations upon discharge from hospitals during the flu season provided vaccines are available.

AB 752 (Dymally) – Provides stabilization funding for public hospitals. This bill was sent to the Governor on 9/13.

AB 1521 – Salas) – This was one of two bottled water bills. It was sent to the Governor on a partisan vote. It is strongly opposed by a number of entities.

AB 1554 (Jones) – Required an approval by the DMHC or Dept. of Insurance prior to any insurance rate increases. Failed passage in the Senate.

SB 32 (Steinberg) – Expands Medi-Cal and Healthy Families Program to families up to 300 % of the federal poverty level. Placed on the Inactive File in the Assembly, pending any outcome of the Special Session Healthcare Reform.

SB 171 (Perata) – Requires hospital to establish a patient protection & health care worker back injury prevent plan. Sent to the Governor on 9/12

SB 210 (Kehoe) – Requires the Air Resources Board to enforce a low-carbon fuel standard by 2010, reducing emissions by 10 percent. Sent to the Governor on 9/19

SB 220 (Corbett) – Relates to water vending machines and bottled water. Increases inspections on vending machines and includes various requirements on both bottled water and vended water. Sent to the Governor on 9/13.

SB 366 (Aanestad) – Removed a sunset provision allowing new imaging technology to continue to be used to detect cervical cancer in women. Signed by the Governor

SB 472 (Corbett) – Requires the Board of Pharmacy to convene a drug labeling panel to develop a standardized format for labeling prescriptions. To Governor 9/12.

SB 474 (Kuehl) This bill addresses funding for designated Medi-Cal and other hospitals. To Governor on 9/19.

SB 494 (Kehoe) Requires Air Resources board to a adopt regulations for a percentage of light duty trucks regarding emission standards. Held in Committee.

SB 533 (Yee) This is second of the 3 bills requiring childhood immunizations. To Governor on 9/19.

SB 676 (Ridley-Thomas) This is the 3rd the immunization bill. This bill was held in Committee. Ridley-Thomas became a co-author of SB 533 (Yee).

SB 840 (Kuehl) – This is the Single-Payer bill. Held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. Could be a viable bill next year.

SB 936 (Perata) This workers' comp bill addresses disabled workers and their compensation. To the Governor on 9/18.

SB 966 (Simitian) – This bill addresses systems for the acceptance and collection of unused Pharmaceuticals. To the Governor on 9/14.

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