

## Elias: Brown's good signatures and two lousy vetoes

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Nine months into Jerry Brown's third term as governor of California, there's no doubt he's made some courageous moves at the desk where he signs and vetoes bills passed by the Legislature.

He OK'd the national popular vote measure previously nixed by ex-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, assuring that California will help see to it that no more presidents are elected with a minority of the national vote, as George W. Bush and three others were. After states possessing more than half of all electoral votes make the same commitment, California's massive electoral vote will always go to the overall popular vote winner.

He signed an Internet sales tax bill as part of last summer's budget agreement, a move toward leveling the playing field between merchants who operate stores and those who sell only on the Internet.

But Brown has also made at least two misguided vetoes. One was a bill by Democratic Assemblyman Bob Blumenfield of suburban Los Angeles which sought to replace the \$169 million Adult Day Health Care program — about to be ended because of state budget cuts passed in June — with a far cheaper alternative serving only the neediest patients.

In his veto message, Brown said "creating a new ADHC look-alike program at this juncture is unnecessary and untimely." He added that the state is working with existing centers to identify alternatives.

That last came as news to the families and workers now involved in ADHC, and the likelihood is that many of the elderly now cared for in community-based centers will end up languishing unaided and unsupervised at home or going to emergency rooms, mental institutions or nursing homes — where they might cost the state far more than they have before. Up until now, the state has paid about \$36 per day per patient, with that funding matched by the federal government.

But there are now waiting lists for nursing home beds in some areas, which probably means a lot of patients who have been kept alive and relatively healthy and lively by ADHC will die years earlier than they otherwise would have.

Only when death rates begin to rise will we know just how destructive this veto may become.

But the mistaken quality of another veto is immediately clear to anyone who frequents supermarkets or big box stores. This was Brown's refusal to sign a measure called Senate Bill 168, which would have prohibited paying initiative petition carriers directly or indirectly on the basis of how many signatures they gather for state or local initiatives, referendums or recall petitions.

In recent years, carriers have been able to get anywhere from 50 cents to \$3, and occasionally even more, for each signature they gather. That's the main reason they often become aggressive at store entrances and exits, waving clipboards in the faces of customers going in or out and sometimes shouting at those who walk on by. Often, the same carrier will hold two clipboards, trying to get signatures on two or more measures from the same person — all in the interest of making more money.

It would be unconstitutional and unfortunate to put a complete stop to signature gathering at store entrances, as some states and some merchants have attempted in the past.

But restoring sanity and decorum to this process would be a good thing. And forcing the organizations that back initiatives to pay petition carriers by the hour or the day rather than strictly for piecework would be a step in this direction.

It also might put a crimp in the trend toward big-money interests taking over the initiative process because they can pay more for signatures and thus attract far more carriers for their measures.

Brown didn't see it that way. "This bill would ... prohibit organizations from even setting targets or quotas for those they hire," he said, adding that "per-signature payment is often the most cost-effective method for collecting the hundreds of thousands of signatures needed to qualify a ballot measure ... this will drive up the cost of circulating ballot measures, thereby further favoring the wealthiest interests."

There is little or no evidence for that last statement. In fact, forcing big-money interests (Amazon.com, before its recent compromise with lawmakers, invested more than \$5 million to gather signatures for a referendum to cancel the new Brown-signed requirement that it and other Internet sellers collect sales tax) to pay daily or hourly wages to carriers is just as likely to bring down the cost of petition circulating as it is to push it up.

The bottom line is that both Brown vetoes were ill considered, based on unsubstantiated information. And both may end up making bad situations worse.