

Davis hardens stance on illegal-immigrants bill;

**GOVERNOR WON'T COMPROMISE ON HIS DEMAND FOR BACKGROUND
CHECKS ON DRIVER-LICENSE APPLICANTS**

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Body

Gov. Gray **Davis** **hardened** his opposition Thursday to a **bill** granting driver's licenses to **illegal immigrants**, insisting legislators adopt his amendments even as lawmakers considered narrowing his proposals.

The **bill** first landed on **Davis**' desk a year ago, but was withdrawn after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Now, the administration is done talking about amendments that would require **background checks** before driver's licenses could be issued to as many as 1 million of the state's estimated 3 million undocumented immigrants, said spokesman Russ Lopez.

"The **governor** believes the amendments are good as they are. The language is strong, and it's necessary," Lopez said. "We have come to the best middle ground on this."

Davis rejected immigration-reform advocates' argument that the state has no business licensing illegal residents, accepting the **bill** supporters' claim that it is better to have undocumented immigrants trained and insured because many would drive anyway. But he promised to veto the measure unless his amendments are added in a companion **bill**.

Another requirement

In addition to **background checks**, licenses should be limited to immigrants who have "lived, worked and paid taxes in California for a substantial period of time," **Davis** said in a letter outlining his requirements.

Latino groups and lawmakers, however, continued negotiating among themselves and with members of the Senate Public Safety Committee on ways to narrow the proposed **background checks**. The committee has delayed a vote on the amendments since Tuesday but is running out of time as lawmakers rush toward a Saturday **bill**-passage deadline.

"The question is if **Davis** is willing to support a **bill** that the Latino groups are willing to support," said Adam Mendelsohn, a spokesman for the committee's chairman, Sen. Bruce McPherson, R-Santa Cruz.

Senate President Pro Tem John Burton of San Francisco believes his fellow Democrat should sign the **bill** without any of the amendments, said spokesman Dave Sebeck.

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Davis fielded Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca and Santa Ana Mayor Miguel Pulido on Thursday to present his case that California should conduct **checks** similar to those already conducted by the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service before issuing licenses to illegal aliens who are employed and awaiting documentation.

Weeding out criminals and repeat substance abusers is necessary so as to "not frighten the rest of Californians who are here legally, and not frighten the rest of America," Baca said.

For all nationalities

Mexican President Vicente Fox personally lobbied **Davis** to permit the licenses, though they would be available to **illegal immigrants** of all nationalities.

Baca rejected arguments by Burton, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and other proponents that the amendments perhaps unconstitutionally discriminate by requiring **illegal immigrants** to undergo security steps not required of other motorists.

Baca, Pulido and Lopez said standards would be needed regardless of last year's terror attacks. But **Davis**, in outlining his proposals to the **bill's** author, Assemblyman Gil Cedillo, D-Los Angeles, specifically cited preventing criminals from using driver's licenses to board airplanes, open bank accounts and rent vehicles.

Read AB 60 and AB 1206 at www.assembly.ca.gov on the Web.

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