

REPEAL IT;

THEN IMPROVE IT;

DRIVER'S LICENSE LAW HAS SECURITY FLAWS, BUT THEY CAN BE FIXED

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Body

Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger is calling the Legislature into session right after his inauguration to keep a campaign promise. As the first order of business, he wants legislators to **repeal** SB 60, allowing illegal immigrants to get **driver's licenses**.

They should. SB 60 has big **flaws**. But the second order of business should be to pass a new **driver's license** bill - one that grants undocumented workers the right to drive without creating the potential for fraud and abuse, not to mention huge lines at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

The sponsor of SB 60, Sen. Gil Cedillo, a Los Angeles Democrat, finally is willing to compromise. But Schwarzenegger must be willing to listen. So far, he has refused.

Schwarzenegger figures he doesn't have to negotiate. He knows that if legislators don't **repeal** the **law**, voters will. Opponents are gathering signatures to put rescission on the March ballot.

Although **it** passed the Legislature last year for the third time, the bill is unpopular outside Sacramento. Two-thirds of voters at last month's recall election told pollsters they opposed **it**, and some cited Gov. Davis' signature as a reason to give him the boot.

That was even before the recent prediction that hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers will crowd understaffed DMV offices to take their driving tests after the **law** takes effect Jan. 1, causing delays of up to six months for Californians to get a **license**. No wonder some Democrats who voted for the bill three months ago are backpedaling fast.

What's being lost in the backlash is the reason the Legislature supported the **law** in the first place.

Undocumented immigrants are integral to our communities and the state's economy. They should be able to drive legally to their jobs and children's schools -- and safely, by having to take a driving test. Until 1994, they had this right in California. Then the **law** was changed to require a Social **Security** number, available only to citizens and legal residents.

SB 60, however, went too far. **It** creates **security** risks and the potential for identity theft by granting **licenses** based on forms of identification that **can't** be verified. Cedillo had included more restrictions in previous years'

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versions, such as requiring background checks and limiting licenses to immigrants who are applying for residency. The latter would substantially cut the eligibility numbers -- and shorten the lines at the DMV.

Efforts to repeal the license law could become a reprise of the ugly fight a decade ago leading to the passage of Proposition 187. That measure, which courts largely overturned, would have denied public education and some health and social services to illegal immigrants.

A governor who sees himself as a unifier can prevent another divisive battle by renegotiating the licensing bill to achieve its goal while eliminating its problems.

Notes

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT DRIVERS

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