

Oct. 15

Schwarzenegger Vetoes DREAM Bill for Immigrant Students

Late Saturday, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger issued a series of vetoes on various bills — and in so doing dashed the hopes of student activists who have been pushing to make it easier for undocumented students to obtain financial aid and to pressure publishers and faculty members into changing practices that some believe contribute to the high price of textbooks. At the same time, Governor Schwarzenegger signed another bill on textbooks, favored by publishers and opposed by student groups.

Immigrant Students

Last year, when Schwarzenegger vetoed legislation that would have allowed some undocumented students to apply for state financial aid, he cited the fear that these students might be competing for limited aid funds with students who are legal residents of California. So this year, sponsors of the bill specifically excluded programs that have limited pots of money, and proposed that the idea apply to aid — like community college tuition waivers — that is not awarded competitively. Advocates for immigrant students hoped that that change would make a difference and held rallies around the state on behalf of the bill.

But the governor's position didn't change. In [his veto message this time](#), he didn't cite competition in specific aid programs for dollars, but competition for the state budget. "At a time when segments of California public higher education, the University of California and the California State University, are raising fees on all students attending college in order to maintain the quality of education provided, it would not be prudent to place additional strain on the general fund to accord the new benefit of providing state subsidized financial aid to students without lawful immigration status," he wrote. Schwarzenegger noted that under existing law, many of these students are already entitled to in-state tuition rates.

Supporters of the legislation noted that there are about 25,000 students who graduate from California high schools each year without documentation to stay in the United States or the right to federal student aid that is essential for many low-income students to afford tuition and other expenses. State Sen. Gilbert Cedillo maintains on [his Web site](#) stories from such students about the difficulties they face paying for college. He and others have argued that these high school graduates will stay in the state —

and the only choice for California is whether to help them prepare for good jobs.

The vetoed legislation is known as the DREAM Act, modeled on other state bills and a federal bill whose acronym stands for Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors. (Democrats in Congress are hoping to [attach the federal bill](#) to other legislation, but have been stymied of late in doing so.)

With the issue attracting attention nationally, political figures outside of California have jumped in. [Sen. Barack Obama](#), in a presidential campaign stop in California last month, said that failing to sign the bill would “compound the immigration crises by driving thousands of children who are on the right path into the shadows.” But conservatives have been urging the governor to veto the bill.

Pro-DREAM groups were quick to criticize the veto and to vow to bring the bill back next year. “The governor has just bowed to the racist wing of the Republican Party. California needs a larger and more diverse workforce to prosper and we can’t continue to relegate Latinos to second class status,” said Yvette Felarca, Northern California coordinator of the Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration and Immigrant Rights and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary.

Debate Over Textbook Costs

The governor’s decision on textbook prices may have implications beyond California. Publishers tend to adopt policies that are consistent with legislation or practice in large states. So had the governor signed the bill he vetoed, the required practices could have spread.

[The bill would have required publishers](#) to provide to faculty members a complete list of products they offer “that are germane to the subject area of interest,” the prices for those products, and “the estimated length of time that the publisher intends to keep that product on the market, and a complete list of all substantive differences or changes made between the current edition and the most recent previous edition of the textbook.”

[The bill signed into law by the governor](#) will instead require publishers to include more pricing information on book covers, to provide more detailed pricing information to those placing orders, and it will require public colleges “to encourage adopters, with course material selection responsibilities to place their orders with sufficient lead time, whenever possible, to enable the university-managed bookstore or contract-managed bookstore to confirm the availability of the requested materials.” The new law also bars those picking textbooks from accepting anything of value for their choices.

In his veto message, Governor Schwarzenegger said that the first bill “focuses strictly on textbook publisher policies and fails to recognize that the affordability of textbooks is a shared responsibility among publishers, college bookstores and faculty members.”

Bruce Hildebrand, executive director for higher education at the Association of American Publishers, praised the governor’s decision. “It’s important that we all work together on this,” he said. Hildebrand said that the bill signed into law would lead to “complete transparency by all the parties involved.”

The vetoed bill, he said, implies that publishers have all the power, when the reality is that individual professors are making the choices, and are considering a variety of factors in addition to cost.

“The faculty make the ultimate decision, as they are supposed to do, based on their students’ needs,” he said. The 200-plus choices available to professors teaching introductory psychology range in price from

around \$22.50 to more than \$120, Hildebrand said. “The choices are there. The faculty are making the choices. The whole key to this is: Is there choice and is there value?”

Advocates for the vetoed bill said that its provisions might have prompted real change. If professors could see that one potential textbook wasn’t due for a revision for six years, for example, while another was being revised every other year, they could pick the former, which would have a healthy and inexpensive used book market. Professors who want to make it possible for students to buy used books have a tough time getting information to make informed choices, these advocates says.

Emily Rusch of the California Public Interest Research Group said that the bill the governor signed would be “really ineffective” because it doesn’t get enough information to professors before they have made their selections. Used textbooks are a key tool for students wanting to economize, Rusch said, and the bill signed into law won’t help make them more available.

“The governor sided with the textbook publishers and not with the students and colleges and faculty,” she said.

PIRG groups have led the push for legislation on textbook costs, and their focus has been on publishers. College bookstores in California backed the student push for the bill Schwarzenegger vetoed.

Don Newton, bookstore manager at City College of San Francisco, monitored the legislation for the California Association of College Stores, and said that the bill the governor signed will do “absolutely nothing” because its provisions are already either standard practice or loopholes will weaken them.

The vetoed bill, he said, would have led to real change. “We see publishers trying to sell faculty without letting them know that the next year they are going to a new edition,” he said.

— [Scott Jaschik](#)

*The original story and user comments can be viewed online at
<http://insidehighered.com/news/2007/10/15/calif>.*