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Lawmakers fail to act on top-priority bills

Left unresolved are measures dealing with prisons, energy, water and furloughs.

By Patrick McGreevy and Shane Goldmacher

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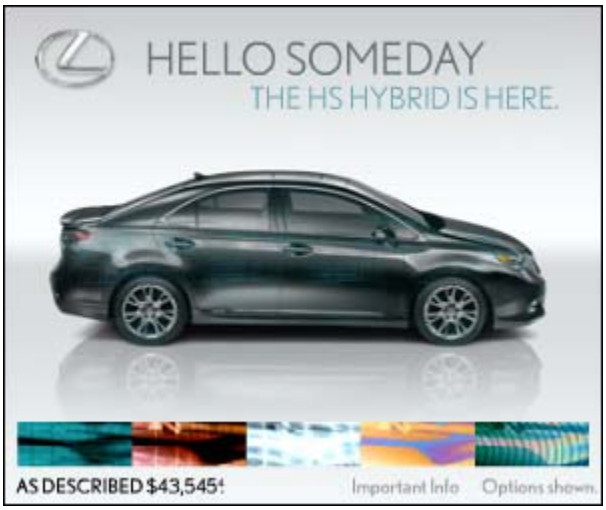
Reporting from Sacramento



State lawmakers failed Thursday to act on a clutch of their top-priority bills, including those involving water, prisons and energy, leaving a logjam of controversial measures to be resolved by midnight tonight, the end of this year's session.

After a long and heated debate, the Assembly passed a last-minute proposal to waive environmental hurdles for a new NFL stadium near L.A. That measure was sent to the Senate for consideration today.

But political disputes and procedural snags left a host of other measures -- many of which have been debated all year -- unresolved with 24 hours left on the clock, including:

* Twin bills that would require 33% of the state's energy to come from solar, wind and geothermal sources by 2020 -- a top priority of Democratic legislative leaders and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

* A package of bills that would significantly expand the state's ability to meet its water needs, including billions of dollars to protect the deteriorating Sacramento Delta while keeping water flowing to thirsty Southern California.

* An effort to bring the Assembly and Senate together on changes to the state prison system to save $1.2 billion committed to by the Legislature during the recent budget crisis.

* Further budget cuts intended to give the governor room to eliminate one of the three unpaid furlough days imposed on state workers each month.

It remains uncertain that agreement on any of the major issues will be achieved. Asked about the difficult agenda for the last day, Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) said: "We have a lot of work tomorrow, but more importantly we have some incredible opportunities to move our state forward."

The effort to waive environmental and planning rules for a professional football stadium in the city of Industry was introduced by Assemblyman Isadore Hall III (D-Compton). He said his days-old bill was needed to allow billionaire Ed Roski's Majestic Realty to woo a National Football League team. The firm wants to build a 75,000-seat stadium in east Los Angeles County.

Hall said the stadium project would bring 18,000 much-needed jobs to the area.

"If you want to vote to not put food on the table of 18,000 families . . . shame on you," he said before the Assembly voted 55 to 15 to approve the bill.

Assemblyman Edward Hernandez (D-West Covina) said the privately funded stadium project should not be passed up: "We're in some extremely bad economic times," he said during the long floor debate.

Independent Assemblyman Juan Arambula of Fresno opposed the bill, saying it would gut the state's environmental-quality laws. The measure would suspend environmental rules that are the basis of a lawsuit by the city of Walnut challenging the stadium project.

"I don't think this is the exception we ought to be approving," Arambula said, "because it sets a bad precedent that if someone has a big enough bankroll, they can get whatever they want out of this Legislature."

Assemblyman Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael) objected that the bill was "jammed through . . . in . . . the dark of night in a mockery of the deliberative process."

The measure also drew fire from San Diego lawmakers concerned that the bill would help Roski lure the Chargers away from their town.

"It's not the job of this body to pick favorites," said Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher (R-San Diego).

Before the Assembly passed the measure, member Lori Saldana (D-San Diego) said she would "adjourn in the memory of the San Diego Chargers."

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