

Schwarzenegger signs bill requiring restaurants to list nutritional content of menu items



Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger holds a news conference outside a Chili's restaurant in Elk Grove, Calif. on Tuesday, Sept. 30, 2008, to sign SB 1420 by Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Pacoima, which makes California the first state in the nation to have its restaurant chains with 20 or more locations statewide post calorie information on menus and indoor menu boards for consumers.

By [Edwin Garcia](#) | Mercury News

PUBLISHED: September 30, 2008 at 1:01 pm | UPDATED: August 14, 2016 at 3:20 am

SACRAMENTO — California is poised to become the first state to require large chain restaurants to notify customers of the nutritional content of menu items, under legislation approved Tuesday by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The bill was one of 300 measures the governor acted on Tuesday in the hours before the annual deadline to consider legislation.

“I’m really pumped up about this, because once again, I tell you, California is the leader in something,” Schwarzenegger said at a bill signing ceremony outside a restaurant in suburban Elk Grove. “We want to make sure that we have healthier choices in our supermarkets, healthier choices in our restaurants, healthier choices in our schools, so that people can make healthier decisions.”

The law, SB 1420 by Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Van Nuys, forces restaurant chains with at least 20 locations to reveal on brochures the amount of calories, saturated fat, carbohydrates and sodium of menu items beginning July 1 — or, if not in a brochure, that they post calories on the menu.

By Jan. 1, 2011, the restaurants will be required to post caloric information on menus and indoor menu boards, and provide brochures, upon request, with nutritional content information at the drive-through.

More than 17,000 restaurant locations will be affected by the measure, which is modeled after a law in New York City, and similar to a menu labeling ordinance recently adopted in unincorporated Santa Clara County.

The California Restaurant Association — which once opposed the so-called calorie-count menu laws and even sued Santa Clara County to block the legislation approved by the board of supervisors — eventually supported the statewide legislation. As a result, an association spokesman said Tuesday, the lawsuit will be abandoned.

California Restaurant Association President Jot Condie said his organization finally backed the bill about a month ago when it became evident that a statewide standard was better than a patchwork of numerous local ordinances.

Padilla proposed the law to combat unhealthy eating habits that he said lead to obesity, diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure. “All told, it is nothing less than a public health crisis,” he said.

Schwarzenegger also took action on several key health care bills, including vetoing a high-profile measure that consumer groups had sought to prohibit insurers from dropping coverage when patients become sick.

AB 1945 would have prevented health care policies from being canceled unless the insurer could show that someone intentionally misrepresented information on an application for coverage.

In his veto message, Schwarzenegger called unfair rescissions “a deplorable practice” but said his administration was aggressively going after the health insurance industry. He said the bill lacked consumer protections and would increase insurance costs to patients.

In response to the veto, the California Nurses Association stated, “Californians again have been abandoned by this governor.”

By late afternoon Tuesday, Schwarzenegger announced his approval of one of the most significant laws advocated by environmentalists. The measure, SB 375 by Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, complements California’s global warming regulations by creating the nation’s first law to fight greenhouse gas emissions through the reduction of suburban sprawl.

The law would make California the first state to attempt to reduce global warming emissions by drawing up regional plans to reduce miles driven by passenger vehicles, then directing most transportation funding only to so-called “smart growth” projects.

“This is a historic day for California,” Steinberg said in a news release.

Bay Area lawmakers had their share of bills signed and vetoed. Among the bills that will become law:

- AB 346 by Assemblyman Jim Beall, D-San Jose, which requires the makers of fruity alcoholic drinks known as alcopops — said to be popular with underage drinkers — to place labels clearly stating the sweet beverages contain alcohol.
- SB 1608 by Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, which improves compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act by ensuring that a qualified specialist in ADA laws will review construction plans and permits.
- SB 1XX by Sen. Don Perata, D-Oakland, which provides \$842 million in funding from initiatives passed by voters in 2006 to increase the state’s water supply, shore up levies and help stabilize the delta.
- SB 541 by Sen. Elaine Alquist, D-San Jose, which sets fines for hospitals that disclose patients’ private medical information and increases fines for hospitals found to commit major medical errors.
- AB 1245 by Assemblyman Alberto Torrico, D-Fremont, which will allow Anheuser-Busch and other breweries to increase the value of promotional gifts it gives away to adults in California.
- AB 919 by Assemblyman Guy Houston, R-Livermore, known as the Internet stalking bill, makes it illegal to post information about someone online to intentionally cause fear, harm or harassment of an individual.

Among the measures vetoed:

- AB 2262 by Torrico, which would have extended to seven days — from the current three days — the time that a newborn’s parents can surrender their baby at a fire station or other safe location without fear of prosecution.
- AB 2173 by Assemblywoman Anna Caballero, D-Salinas, which would have revised 10-year-old rules on developer fees to collect more money to pay for school construction.
- SB 1731, by Sen. Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, would have raised vehicle license fees by \$1 to fund an expansion of roving tow-trucks that assist stranded motorists on Bay Area freeways.

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