

California Governor Newsom issues vetoes against healthcare and worker benefits

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Over the past few weeks, Democratic California Governor Gavin Newsom has made headlines for vetoing more than 100 bills that arrived at his desk for signature, many of which have been backed by unions such as the Teamsters and Writers Guild of America. Most of the bills vetoed by Newsom had wide popular support and would have won easily if put on the ballot for a referendum vote.

These included a bill to cap insulin payments at \$35 per month per patient, one to allow the free distribution of condoms and other contraceptives to high school students and another to provide unemployment insurance to workers on picket lines who largely receive no strike pay from their respective unions. An additional bill vetoed by the governor would have prohibited caste-based discrimination in the workplace.

The vetoes are all the more significant given Newsom's prominent position within the Democratic Party nationally. He is often put forward as a hypothetical replacement for the elderly and befuddled President Joe Biden should the latter not be able to run for reelection.

Democrats have presented Newsom as a foil to fascistic governors in the Republican Party such as Greg Abbott of Texas and Ron DeSantis of Florida. In contrast to those two, Newsom, appearing on Fox News, has utilized his public prominence to falsely posture as an ardent defender of abortion, immigrant and gay rights and environmental protection.

With the latest vetoes, the California governor, whose career was launched by the largesse of the Getty oil family, is adopting a deliberately right-wing stance in order to distance himself from any shred of liberal reformism and position himself as a more "mainstream," i.e., pro-corporate, Democrat, in preparation for a future presidential campaign, either in 2028 or even next year.

Regarding the insulin bill, State Senator Scott Wiener,

who sponsored it, called Newsom's veto "a major setback that will keep thousands of diabetic Californians trapped in the terrible choice between buying insulin and buying food."

A 10-millimeter vial of insulin now costs between \$170 and \$400 and, with a typical diabetic needing up to three vials a month, the uninsured could expect to pay up to \$1,200 each month for these life-saving medications. Moreover, even for the insured, the treatments can still be prohibitively expensive, with many insured expected to pay expensive deductibles each year before their medications are even covered, with such deductibles sometimes running into the thousands of dollars.

According to the American Diabetes Association, around 3.2 million people, or 10.5 percent of California's adult population, have been diagnosed with diabetes, underscoring the scale of the human cost of Newsom's veto.

The governor rationalized his veto claiming that the state's partnership with Civica Rx, a nonprofit generic drug company, would ensure the production of low-cost insulin, making the bill's price cap unnecessary. The nonprofit was created in 2018, and the \$50 million deal it made with the state for low-cost insulin was made only in March 2023. The company's claims to provide low-cost insulin are as yet completely unproven.

Justifying his veto of the bill to provide free distribution of condoms to high schools, Newsom claimed that the program couldn't be funded due to the state's \$30 billion budget shortfall.

The bill would have also covered the cost of human papillomavirus vaccinations for children under 18 and prevented retailers from verifying age of identification when minors attempt to purchase contraceptives. Newsom's veto will have a devastating impact on the state's youth, particularly in impoverished rural and urban areas alike. It comes as the rate of sexually

transmitted infections soars in California.

Data has shown that young people aged 15 to 24 account for more than half of the recent rise in sexually transmitted disease across the state. Five in 10 chlamydia cases in the state are among young people, and young people account for a troubling reemergence of syphilis in California and across the country.

By vetoing the bill, which would cost a fraction of the costs of treatment for STIs, not to mention the costs of unwanted pregnancies, the governor is providing a major gift to the far right and its attack on science and public health.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's Dobbs decision overturning a woman's constitutional right to an abortion, the right to contraception is under sustained attack by religious obscurantists in the Christian right who often find ready-made allies in the judicial system. On April 7, to cite only one example, US District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, an anti-abortion fanatic appointed by Donald Trump, overturned the approval of the early term abortifacient drug mifepristone, which provides hundreds of thousands of women with safe abortions each year.

As in his veto of the contraceptives bill, Newsom claimed that the state did not have sufficient funds for a bill providing unemployment benefits to striking workers. The governor alleged that the state's unemployment fund was already \$20 billion in the red, an announcement that will likely presage calls for either paring down or eliminating state unemployment benefits in general.

"Now is not the time to increase costs or incur this sizable debt," Newsom wrote in September 30 statement on his veto.

Responding to the governor's announcement, Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, executive secretary-treasurer of the California Labor Federation, remarked, "This veto tips the scales further in favor of corporations and CEOs and punishes workers who exercise their fundamental right to strike."

These are crocodile tears, however, since the unions ardently backed Newsom's election and reelection, and care nothing about the actual financial position of workers who go on strike. On the contrary, they favor the maximum possible economic stress on their own striking members, since that will help the bureaucrats in one of their primary missions, blocking or suppressing strike action.

The unions had also been hoping for the bill's passage to relieve them of any possible obligation to provide strike

pay out of their multi-million-dollar strike funds while their members were on the picket line, preferring to use the funds to pay bureaucrats' salaries and boost Democratic Party election campaigns. In fact, the unions regularly advise their members to contact charitable organizations and take advantage of debt forgiveness programs while on the picket lines while the union bureaucrats continue to collect their regular salaries.

In any case, the bill would have only provided unemployment insurance to those workers who had been on strike for more than two consecutive weeks. In pushing the measure, Democratic State Senator Anthony Portantino argued that the impact on the state's unemployment insurance fund would be minimal given only two strikes that took place over the past 10 years lasted more than two weeks, due to the efforts of the trade unions to keep strikes under their control limited and ineffectual.

The governor also vetoed several anti-discrimination bills in addition to the anti-caste discrimination bill mentioned earlier. These included a bill that would have banned employment discrimination based on family caregiver status. Another, Assembly Bill 1645, would have barred insurers from imposing copays and other cost-sharing arrangements for certain preventive services and screenings such as the drugs used for HIV prevention, known as pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP.

Assembly Bill 1432, also vetoed by Newsom, would have required out-of-state insurers to provide plans for Californians to cover abortion and related services along with gender-affirming care.



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