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Essential Politics: California Legislature's session ends in the wee hours

SEPT. 1, 2016, 6 A.M.

Welcome to Essential Politics, our daily feed on California government and politics news. This year's legislative session finally closed out early Thursday morning after a long and busy day for lawmakers.

- Legislative leaders and Gov. Jerry Brown on Wednesday broke through a two-year impasse to reach a deal on how to spend money generated by the state's cap-and-trade auctions.
- A number of bills died in the final hours of the legislative session.

Take a look at some [scenes from the legislative session](#) captured by the L.A. Times.

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Framed, Part 5 : He blamed her — but would the jury buy it?

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3:56 P.M.

Sen. Barbara Boxer on the ailing Salton Sea: 'This is a crisis waiting to happen'



Sarah D. Wire

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Sen. Barbara Boxer on Thursday visited the Salton Sea and tried to put pressure on state and federal agencies to use more of their resources on saving it.

"This is a crisis waiting to happen, and it is the time for firm leadership by every single stakeholder," she told reporters after touring a restoration project at Red Hill Marina, according to a transcript.

The Salton Sea was created in 1905 when the Colorado River broke through a silt-laden canal and poured into a basin near Brawley known as the Salton Sink. It grew into a 360-square-mile lake straddling Riverside and Imperial counties, but it has been shrinking, causing record-high salinity levels and animal die-offs.

Boxer's visit came a week after The Times reported on complaints from local officials

that the state is years behind on efforts to protect wildlife and mitigate pesticide-laced dust that blows up from the drying basin.

Boxer praised recent state and federal moves to put more money into the project, but said it isn't enough.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed a state budget in June that included \$80.5 million for Salton Sea restoration. The funding came from a \$7.5-billion water bond passed two years ago by California voters.

And earlier this year, the Obama administration announced an additional \$3 million in funding for Salton Sea restoration.

But Boxer criticized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for not funding a restoration program that she created in 2007 even though President Obama put money for it into last year's budget.

Boxer has said resolving Salton Sea's funding issues is one of her priorities before she leaves office in January.

Times staff writer Louis Sahagun contributed to this report.

Latest updates

SEPT. 1, 2016

6:00 A.M. SEPT. 1, 2016, 6:00 A.M.

REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

Here's a look at some of the Legislature's most notable moments



John Myers

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(Gary Coronado/Los Angeles Times)

Lawmakers early Thursday morning wrapped up their work for the two-year session of the California Legislature, heaping praise on their many accomplishments.

Even so, at least one major item on the to-do list was never resolved. And some of the battles during this session could leave political scars that last much longer.

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SEPT. 1, 2016

12:44 A.M. SEPT. 1, 2016, 12:44 A.M.

REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

Consumers could pay a new battery recycling fee under a bipartisan bill sent to the governor's desk



John Myers

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Soil taken from a yard in Commerce near the now-shuttered Exide battery plant is tested in February by a team from the L.A. County Health Department. (Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times)

Californians who purchase lead-acid batteries like those used to start cars and trucks would pay a new \$1 fee under legislation sent to Gov. Jerry Brown early Thursday morning, with the funds earmarked for cleaning up contaminated sites such as the former Exide battery plant in Los Angeles County.

The fee charged to battery buyers would rise to \$2 in 2022. Lawmakers would direct the revenues — estimated to be as much as \$40 million a year — to deal with contamination sites as needed.

"For four decades, our community has been waiting for something," said Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia (D-Bell Gardens), the author of AB 2153.

The bill was the final piece of legislation taken up before the Legislature adjourned, and it received a quick bipartisan vote in both houses within a span of only a few minutes. Garcia said there were late negotiations with the Brown administration on the final details.

AB 2153, if signed into law, would not take effect until April 1, 2017. Battery manufacturers and consumers would each pay \$1 fees on each new battery for the first five years of the proposal; after that, the full \$2 fee would be shouldered by consumers.

Some Republican legislators said that setup is a mistake.

"This tax is regressive," Assemblyman Travis Allen (R-Huntington Beach) said during the midnight debate. "It's paid by the people who make the least amount of money."

The Vernon site of the former Exide battery plant was closed under a deal with federal prosecutors last March. Lead contamination in the soil of homes around the plant was discovered two years ago. The battery fee would likely go first to Exide cleanup efforts, which are already underway. Brown [estimated in February](#) that the price tag could reach \$176.6 million.

SEPT. 1, 2016

12:31 A.M. SEPT. 1, 2016, 12:31 A.M.

REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

Sorry, Internet poker fans. It won't be legal in California anytime soon



Patrick McGreevy

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After 10 bills over eight years failed to legalize Internet poker in California, the latest plan also died Wednesday in the Legislature amid continued squabbling by competing factions of the gambling industry.

A bill that would have allowed Californians to legally play poker online lacked support from two-thirds of Assembly members and was not brought up for a vote on the last day of the legislative session.

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SEPT. 1, 2016

12:09 A.M. SEPT. 1, 2016, 12:09 A.M.

The clock runs out on a major bid to overhaul the state's

energy regulator

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AUG. 31, 2016

11:56 P.M. AUG. 31, 2016, 11:56 P.M.

Effort to add members to Southern California air quality board fails

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AUG. 31, 2016

11:41 P.M. AUG. 31, 2016, 11:41 P.M.

REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

Lawmakers say goodbye to their termed-out colleagues on

the final day in Sacramento

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Sophia Bollag



Outgoing Democratic state Sens. Isadore Hall III of Compton, left, and Mark Leno of San Francisco share a moment on the last day of the two-year legislative session. (Rich Pedroncelli / Associated Press)

Lawmakers cried, sang, recited limericks and confessed crushes on departing colleagues this week in their farewell speeches for California legislators whose terms are up.

For 14 Assembly members and six state senators, Wednesday likely marked their last day arguing on the floors of their respective chambers. In an end-of-session tradition, lawmakers said goodbye to their termed-out colleagues between voting on bills.

Assemblyman Matt Dababneh (D-Encino) revealed he might have a legislative crush on outgoing Assemblywoman Nora Campos (D-San Jose).

"I will not miss anyone more than I will miss you," Dababneh told Campos, who is running for state Senate this fall. "Often as a single guy, I get asked ... when are you going to find the perfect girl, and I say, 'If I find anyone half as amazing as Nora Campos, I would be married the next day.'"

Campos, like the other members whose terms are up, served six years in the Assembly.

Termed-out state senators have served eight years. Although new 12-year term limits were passed in 2012, lawmakers elected in 2010, including Campos, are still subject to the old term limits.

Assemblywoman Cheryl Brown (D-San Bernardino) sang “Katcho, Katcho Man” to the tune of “Macho Man” by the Village People while saying goodbye to Assemblyman Katcho Achadjian (R-San Luis Obispo).

Assemblyman Joaquin Arambula (D-Fresno) recited a limerick he wrote for departing Assemblyman Roger Hernández (D-West Covina) that drew chuckles for the line, “As a doctor, I’m happy your blood pressure is lower.”

Hernandez was running for U.S. Congress before allegations of domestic violence involving his ex-wife “crippled” his ability to campaign, he [told reporters earlier this month](#). After a judge issued a domestic violence restraining order against him, he took a nearly three-week leave of absence from the Legislature for high blood pressure.

The speeches featured many bipartisan compliments for departing lawmakers.

Sen. Joel Anderson (R-Alpine) described Sen. Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) as his liberal complement [in the Senate](#).

“This is a sad day for me. You see, Mark completes me,” Anderson said. “I’m sorry I have two more years and I won’t be spending them here with you.”

Assemblyman Richard Gordon (D-Menlo Park) wiped away tears as fellow Assemblyman Brian Jones (R-Santee) thanked him.

“If I have been able to have any effect across the aisle, it’s because of your grace and your compassion,” Jones said. “If I had the opportunity to give back my six years so you could have six more, I would do it in a heartbeat.”

AUG. 31, 2016

11:40 P.M. AUG. 31, 2016, 11:40 P.M.

REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

California workers won't be getting double pay for Thanksgiving Day duty



Liam Dillon



(Jay L. Clendenin / Los Angeles Times)

State lawmakers defeated a measure late Wednesday that would have given retail and grocery store employees who work on Thanksgiving double pay.

Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez (D-San Diego), the bill's author, said it was needed as more and more retailers were extending Black Friday sales into Thanksgiving Day.

"I narrowed and narrowed and narrowed this bill so it only affects the things that concern us the most: the larger retailers who continue to open up on Thanksgiving rather than allowing people to stay home with their families," Gonzalez said.

No opponents to the measure spoke on the Assembly floor, but numerous business groups, including the California Chamber of Commerce, were against it. They argued the bill unfairly hurts big-box retailers that are competing with online outlets for sales. The measure fell 10 votes short of passage, with both Republicans and Democrats in opposition.

A similar bill from Gonzalez failed last year.

AUG. 31, 2016

11:34 P.M. AUG. 31, 2016, 11:34 P.M.

REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

An overhaul of California's taxi regulations passes the Legislature



Liam Dillon

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(Brian van der Brug, Los Angeles Times)

In potentially a major change to California's taxi business, state lawmakers passed legislation late Wednesday [to centralize control over the industry](#), an effort supporters said would allow cabs to better compete with Uber, Lyft and other ride-hailing services.

The bill, AB 650, would prohibit local governments from setting taxi rates or limit the

number of taxis on the road as well as allowing cabs to pick up and drop off passengers outside specific local jurisdictions. Ride-hailing companies have looser regulations in those areas and have made [significant inroads into the taxi business](#).

“The laws and regulations governing the provisions of transportation services are many decades old and have evolved slowly,” said the bill’s author, Assemblyman Evan Low (D-Campbell). “As with many new technologies, the rapid growth of [ride-hailing] companies has created a disruption in taxis’ archaic model of transportation.”

Under the bill, the taxi industry would be regulated by state departments that handle transportation. The measure exempts San Francisco, which backers of the measure described as having a unique taxi medallion system. AB 650 would take effect as soon as next year, once Gov. Jerry Brown finishes a reorganization of transportation departments.

The bill has caused significant consternation among local governments and within the taxi industry. Last week, the city of Los Angeles voted to oppose the measure unless it was also exempted. Since that vote, Low changed the legislation to accommodate some of the largest objections. Cities will still be allowed to force taxis to pick up in every neighborhood to prevent discrimination and require taxis to accommodate people with disabilities.

Some lawmakers opposed to the bill argued on the Assembly floor that it was rushed.

Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez (D-San Diego) also contended that the measure lowered worker protections for taxi drivers in an effort to increase competition with ride-hailing companies.

“Those are such terrible jobs with such few regulations that protect workers that to say the answer to the [ride-hailing] problem, and there is a problem in the sharing economy, is to say, ‘Let’s just forget regulations?’” Gonzalez said. “That may be somebody’s answer, but that’s not mine.”

The bill now heads to Brown’s desk.

Times staff writer Laura J. Nelson contributed to this report.

AUG. 31, 2016

11:34 P.M. AUG. 31, 2016, 11:34 P.M.

REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

Bill to advance California's high-speed rail project is sent to Gov. Brown

Sophia Bollag

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A bridge in Fresno under construction in March is meant to one day be used by the California High Speed Rail. (California High Speed Rail Authority)

In the last few hours before the end of session, lawmakers passed a measure to advance the California bullet train project.

Voters approved nearly \$10 billion in bonds for the high-speed rail project in 2008, but it has since stalled. The bill passed Wednesday would [clarify wording in the 2008 measure](#) and allow some of the money for the project to upgrade existing rail lines.

"It's a critical investment in our infrastructure," the bill's author, Assemblyman Kevin Mullin (D-South San Francisco), said.

But opponents say the bill passed Wednesday alters the voter-approved measure too much.

"This is a revision of what the voters intended," Assemblyman Jim Patterson (R-Fresno) said.

The bill, AB 1889, now heads to the governor for approval.

AUG. 31, 2016

11:11 P.M. AUG. 31, 2016, 11:11 P.M.

The clock is ticking towards midnight in the Assembly l t f

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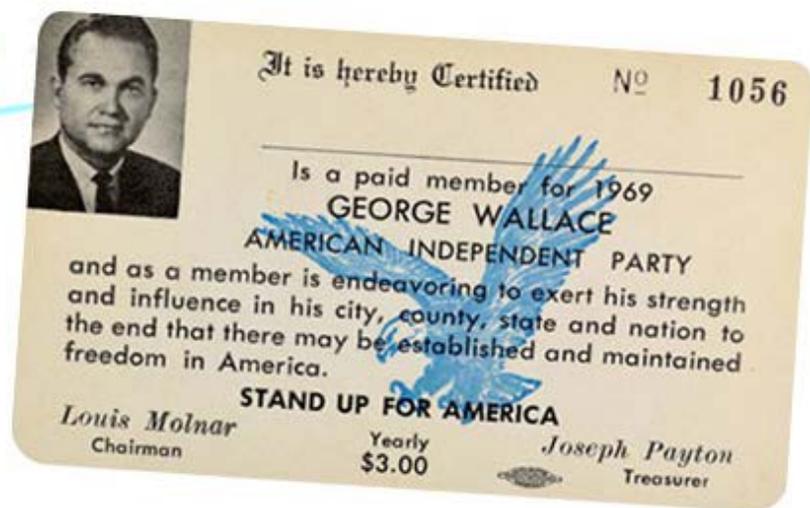
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