

Calif. water districts could be taxed under proposed bill

By Bradley J. Fikes, North County Times

Retail water districts would pay a new tax under proposed state legislation to fund water-related supply, environmental and recreation projects. The size of the tax has yet to be calculated, but it would be significant.

A hearing is scheduled May 4 for the bill, Senate Bill 34, in the California Senate's Governance and Finance committee. Since the bill would impose a tax, it requires two-thirds approval by the Legislature.

SB34 was introduced in the Natural Resources and Water committee by state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto. The influential legislator is perhaps best known as the author of California's hands-free cellphone law. The water tax bill was approved April 12 by the committee on a 5-3 vote.

Simitian is offering SB 34 as an alternative to an \$11.4 billion water bond measure the Legislature recently placed on the ballot for November 2012. The bill doesn't specify the level of taxes but is expected to be revised later to do so.

Backers say the bill pays for necessary upgrades to California's water infrastructure, especially in the Sacramento River delta, which showed its inadequacy during the state's recently ended drought.

Opponents say SB34 doesn't give specifics about where the money will be spent. They include water districts around the state and the Association of California Water Agencies, a statewide organization of water agencies.

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