

Calif. voters to be automatically registered at DMV

By Juliet Williams, AP

SACRAMENTO – Gov. Jerry Brown has approved legislation to make California the second state in the nation to begin automatically registering eligible voters when they obtain or renew their driver's licenses.

AB1461 by Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego, aims to boost California's voter rolls by registering visitors to the Department of Motor Vehicles and was among dozens of bills that Brown announced Saturday he had signed.

It follows Oregon's move earlier this year to adopt the nation's first automatic voter registration law.

The legislation backed by Democratic Secretary of State Alex Padilla calls for data collected by the DMV to be provided to the secretary of state's office, which would verify a resident's legal eligibility to vote before registering them. Drivers would have the option to opt out or cancel their voter registration at any time.

The legislation was among a package of election and voter bills that Brown signed, including AB 44 by Assemblyman Kevin Mullin, D-South San Francisco, which allows the governor to order a state-funded, manual recount of any statewide ballot measure or elected office in which the margin of victory is extremely small.

Padilla praised the signing of the automatic registration bill.

"Citizens should not be required to opt-in to their

fundamental right to vote,” he said in a statement. “We do not have to opt-in to other rights, such as free speech or due process. The right to vote should be no different.”

Lawmakers approved the so-called motor voter law this summer and have held events around the state encouraging Brown to sign it. They say it could add millions of newly registered voters to California’s voter rolls, improving a lackluster registration system that has led to some of the lowest participation rates in the country.

Some Republican lawmakers say voters shouldn’t be forced to sign up. They warn that automatic registration could lead to voter fraud if people who are not eligible are accidentally registered.

Critics have also argued that merely increasing voter registration will not make Californians more engaged in the political process or interested in voting.

Brown Saturday also announced other bill signings:

- SB707 bans concealed weapons from California schools and universities. It drew renewed attention after a recent massacre at an Oregon community college.
- SB27 gives California the toughest limits in the nation on the use of antibiotics in livestock.

The governor also vetoed nine bills sponsored by fellow Democrats that would have created new tax credits or expanded existing tax credits.

Brown said the state’s budget is still facing financial uncertainties, and the tax credits would make balancing the state’s budget even more difficult.