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Panel votes to kill workfare

Conferees reject funds for S.D.; mistaken vote a factor

By Daniel C. Carson, Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO — A joint Assembly-Senate budget committee yesterday voted twice to kill San Diego County's 2-year-old experiment that requires some welfare recipients to work as a condition of receiving benefits.

A mistaken vote by a Republican senator — which he later tried unsuccessfully to reverse — was apparently the final nail in the coffin of the highly publicized workfare program.

Barring some last-minute breakthrough in budget negotiations involving legislative leaders and Gov. Deukmejian, the program will die July 1 for lack of funding and authorization.

San Diego's program had been the showpiece for conservative Republicans who have been pressing through legislation or the initiative process to expand workfare statewide.

But it also became the focal point of criticism from welfare-rights and civil-rights groups who said that San Diego's experiment instead proved that workfare was demeaning and disruptive to aid recipients and that it cost more taxpayers' money than it saved.

A two-house conference committee yesterday voted to accept the Assembly version of the budget, which provided no money or continued authority for a one-year extension of workfare in San Diego County. The Senate-approved version would have provided \$205,000.

The \$205,000 would have been used to match federal and county funds to continue the work-placement effort for recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children. It was put into the Senate version at the behest of Sen. Wadie Deddeh, D-Chula Vista, and other members of the San Diego County legislative delegation.

Sen. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, a conference committee panelist, yesterday urged approval of the Senate allocation. "My evaluation is, it's a good program and it ought to be extended."

Shot back the committee chairman, Assemblyman John Vasconcellos, D-San Jose: "My information is that it's a lousy program, with high cost and little results, and it ought not to be extended."

Vasconcellos argued that it was improper to use the budget bill as a vehicle to continue the San Diego

A motion to deny funding for workfare was then approved on a 4-to-2 vote. Because only one member from each house objected — Garamendi in the Senate and Assemblyman Bill Leonard, R-Loma Linda, from the lower house — the motion passed.

To the apparent surprise of San Diego legislators, Sen. Robert Beverly, R-Manhattan Beach, did not object to a motion that went contrary to the wishes of the governor and Republican legislators. Had he done so, the motion would have failed, because conference rules require two members of each house to concur in any committee decision.

"I wasn't aware of the extent of the issue," Beverly explained later.

Shortly after the vote, Sens. Jim Ellis, R-San Diego, and Bill Craven, R-Oceanside, who are not members of the committee, sidled up to Beverly and engaged him in animated conversation. Soon thereafter, Beverly put forward a motion to reverse the committee's prior vote and fund the workfare program.

"I am told this (prior action) terminates the program," said Beverly. He termed funding of workfare "of vital concern to Senator Craven and others."

But his motion for a turnaround was blocked by the objections of the panel's two Assembly Democrats — Vasconcellos and Maxine Waters of Los Angeles.

Kevin Aslanian, a lobbyist for the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organization, pronounced himself "elated" by yesterday's events.

"We have no problem with any program that is voluntary," Aslanian

said. "We're very resentful when they force programs down people's throats."

"There are people who suffered a lot of harm under this program. After being in operation for two years, we have not received any kind of evaluation to prove this program is successful."

"Hopefully if this action is sustained there will be no more children foodless or homeless for 90 days," he said. Aslanian asserted that 200 or more welfare recipients ordered to take jobs were "sanctioned" or deprived of their benefits for not going along with the program.

But Garamendi, who tried and failed earlier this year to pass a bill to phase in San Diego County's workfare experiment statewide over five years, said he was "very upset" by the budget committee's decision.

"The San Diego program should have stayed," he said.

Garamendi cited preliminary findings that 50 percent of the participants found work without any publicly subsidized training; that 42 percent of those engaged in job-search workshops found employment; and that 22 percent of those engaged in workfare found jobs.

The average wage for recipients who did find work was over \$5 per hour, he noted. He described the program as "efficiently (using) scarce job training resources."

Garamendi said some elements of the program, including job-training workshops meant to divert applicants into private-sector jobs before they became part of the welfare system, will continue even if workfare ceases on July 1.

He said he hadn't given up yet, conceding "at the moment it doesn't look good." He said one tactic might be to put authorization for the program into the so-called budget "trailer" bill containing statutory changes necessary to bring the 1964-65 spending plan into balance.