



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / [Opinion](#).

Editorial: Outsource at home

Private engineers should get a bite of 1B

-

Published 12:00 am PDT Wednesday, April 18, 2007

The headline in last week's Bee called the California Supreme Court's unanimous decision upholding Proposition 35 a "blow to unions." Look more closely.

Some unions, specifically the public employee union that represents government highway engineers and architects -- the one that filed suit seeking to invalidate Proposition 35 -- might be hurt. But other unions, particularly those that represent private-sector workers, stand to gain.

Seven years ago voters approved Proposition 35, which has been mired in litigation ever since. The measure makes it easier for the state to contract with private engineers and architects to work on state projects such as highways, dams, levees and office buildings. The court affirmed the state's right to open up the public works construction market.

Union and nonunion operating engineers, carpenters, bricklayers, cement workers -- the panoply of craftspeople and construction workers who depend on a quick, efficient and steady flow of public works projects to keep them employed -- should applaud the court's decision.

And so should a public trapped in gridlock. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said the decision "helps to ensure that \$20 billion in transportation bond funds passed by voters last November will bring traffic relief to commuters faster and more cost effectively."

The nonpartisan California Legislative Analyst's Office estimates the state will need 4,800 additional engineers to design and engineer the billions in transportation projects authorized under Proposition 1B. Caltrans cannot hire and train that many qualified staffers fast enough. The analyst recommends that the Legislature "authorize additional use of contracted resources as necessary to ensure timely delivery of projects."

Public Engineers in California Government, the union that sued to invalidate Proposition 35, already has turned to allies in the Legislature for help. Among other things, PECG is pushing Assembly Bill 1337 by Assemblyman Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara, to bar all but public employees from inspecting highway projects. The Legislature should view this and all other measures PECG promotes with extreme skepticism, examining whether the bills hamper timely and efficient use of public funds.

The governor has made it clear he wants public-private partnerships to rebuild the state's

tattered transportation infrastructure as quickly and cost effectively as possible. If Democrats in the Legislature stymie those efforts by placating the public employee unions that bankroll their campaigns, voters waiting in traffic jams across California will know whom to blame.

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

[Copyright](#) © [The Sacramento Bee](#)