

Groups Fight Proposal to Tax Vet Care for Pets

Animal welfare advocates across California urge pet owners to act.

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Ever since Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger went public with his plan to dig the state of California out of an \$11.2 billion budget hole by charging sales tax for "luxury" items such as appliance and furniture repair, vehicle repair, golf, and veterinary services, animal welfare groups across the state have begun to mobilize in an effort to defeat the proposal.

Judie Mancuso, president of Social Compassion in Legislation, a nonprofit focused on managing the pet population through legislation, said that the last thing that families need during this time of economic uncertainty is an increase in medical costs. "Our companion animals are family members and taking care of their health is a responsibility, not a discretionary spending decision like golf or furniture repair," Mancuso said in a statement.

According to the governor's website, this plan is expected to generate additional General Fund sales tax revenue of \$357 million. If passed, the proposal would be effective Feb. 1, 2009.

However, Dr. Barbara Hodges of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association said that veterinary care should not be considered a nonessential or luxury service, but rather as truly essential family medical services. Hodges and other professionals in the field expressed concerns about the new tax possibly forcing pet owners to delay seeking care for their cats and dogs and putting off necessary treatments such as heartworm medication.

Budget negotiations are ongoing between the governor and legislative leaders. The special session to deal with the state's budget crisis ends for the year on Nov. 30.