

Local officials' tenacity pays off in state Capitol

By JAMIE S. CACKLER
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SACRAMENTO — On Thursday, the first day of the California legislature's special session on earthquake relief, the spotlight turned to the well-known leaders of the cities of San Francisco and Oakland.

San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos grabbed the TV cameras when he breezed in to make a pitch for aid to rebuild battered portions of his city.

Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson and one Alameda County supervisor spent half a day meeting the press and describing that community's problems following the collapse of the now notorious I-880 Cypress structure.

But after the hoopla of the opening day of the legislature's "Extraordinary Session" on earthquake relief, leaders of most cities and counties went home, trusting their fate to their representatives in the Assembly and Senate.

Santa Cruz County leaders, however, did not go home.

They took rooms at the Holiday Inn, and parked themselves in the offices of Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Monterey, Senator Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, and other influential lawmakers.

County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello, and supervisors

State legislators approve earthquake-relief sales tax

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SACRAMENTO — The state Legislature approved a 13-month, quarter-cent sales tax increase Saturday to raise \$800 million to help repair damage in Northern California resulting from last month's 7.1 temblor.

The new tax will begin Dec. 1 — just in time for Christmas shopping season, noted angry Republicans in both houses.

After three days of hurried and confusing committee debate and deal-making, the tax increase and 11 bills describing quake relief measures passed in the Assembly

by 56-17 and in the Senate by 32-2.

A small group of assembly Republicans — mainly Southern Californians — bitterly fought the tax increase, and staved it off briefly Saturday afternoon. To pass the emergency tax, the Assembly needed two-thirds of its members to agree — at least 54 votes. The first time they voted, the count was 53-17. But after a brief break, the majority flushed out three more votes among holdouts, and prevailed.

Patrick Nolan, R-Glendale, and Tom McClintock, the Republican whip from Ventura County, argued

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Robley Levy, Gary Patton and Fred Keeley, hung around to lobby.

Levy said the other cities and counties may be sorry they didn't stay. After four major disasters in a decade, Santa Cruz leaders know from experience, she said.

"One of the first rules of politics is 'always be there.' What you don't know will hurt you," Levy said.

Keeley said their strategy was to assign one team to follow Farr, another to follow Mello, and a third to run between the two, and to any other hot spot.

Their efforts were richly rewarded, according to Farr and Mello, and the county leaders themselves.

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that the state should either take the money out of its nearly \$1 billion safety-net cash reserve or make up the money by halting spending for three months.

But many other assembly members attacked those alternatives, and Speaker Willie Brown, in an impassioned speech, noted that even the Republican governor believed the tax increase was needed to heal the widespread devastation in seven California counties.

By an agreement made between the governor and legislative leaders before the three-day "Extraordinary Session," the Senate

and Assembly each passed 12 bills that were identical to the ones in the other house.

Gov. George Deukmejian said he would sign the bills sometime this week.

While the legislators were divided on how to finance earthquake recovery, they voted unanimously on 11 other bills on how to use the money — wherever it came from.

Most important to Santa Cruz County were:

- A bill providing 3-percent state-financed loans to owners of rental properties destroyed or damaged in the earthquake. The would forgive

the loans if landlords continue to offer affordable rents to low-income people during the term of the loans. The same bill, authored by Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Monterey, also allows a state agency to make grants for repair of housing for farmworkers.

- Bills providing grants and loans for renters, homeowners and small business owners who have fallen through the cracks of federal aid programs.

- A bill carried by state Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, providing aid for small farms, nurseries and agricultural-related busi-

nesses. Santa Cruz County supervisors Robley Levy and Fred Keeley said this bill was of critical importance because no federal or state disaster programs existed to help those farms and businesses. The bill sets aside money to guarantee low-interest loans from private banks and loan institutions.

- A transportation bill which included \$300,000 for the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District. Keeley said the aid will make up money the transit district is going to lose in sales tax revenues be-

cause so many businesses were destroyed in the earthquake.

- A parks bill providing \$500,000 for reconstruction and repairs in quake-damaged state parks, such as Big Basin, Natural Bridges and Seacliff Beach.

- A bill requiring the state to make up for property tax revenues lost to the county as a result of the earthquake. The state aid will come in two parts — loans to cover revenue shortfalls resulting from temporary deferral of local property tax payments, and outright grants

to make up for property tax revenues lost after severely damaged homes and businesses are reassessed at a lower value.

- A bill requiring the state to pay local governments' share of disaster-repair bills. The federal government picks up about 75 percent of the tab on many bills, and the state and local governments are supposed to split the rest. The state's 100-percent pledge is very important to the disaster-impooverished county, County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello said.

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"They were able to identify for me important items which I put into my bill," Mello said.

One of the most important bills passed by the Senate, authored by Mello, has "got their language in it," the senator said.

"The process of introducing bills to 120 people more than anything is an educational process," Farr said. The more knowledgeable people you have around to help, the better, he said.

Santa Cruz County supervisors, Farr said, were "not only people from areas hardest hit, but (they were) people who are experienced in (speaking) government-ese," he

said. They spoke a bureaucratic language the lawmakers could understand.

For example, the Santa Cruz leaders influenced part of a key bill that allows the state to pay 100 percent of the state and local governments' share of disaster projects. This means that on expensive projects, such as the repair of the San Lorenzo River and Pajaro River levees, where the federal government pays 75 percent of the tab, the state may now pick up the other 25 percent of the tab, and require no contribution from disaster-impooverished counties like Santa Cruz.

On the assembly side, Farr said

the Santa Cruz delegation had a lot to do with getting Farr and other lawmakers to write a bill that sets aside \$1 million for grants to help individuals and small businesses who can't get money anywhere else.

The Santa Cruz leaders also came up with the idea for the state to set aside an unspecified sum of money to guarantee loans to small businesses. "Those items were never on anybody's list until they came up here," Farr said.

Now, Farr said, it will be up to the private banks and loan institutions to "step up and make those loans, because we have taken away their risk."