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Governor threatens veto of Democratic health plan

By Kevin Yamamura - Bee Capitol Bureau

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Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Wednesday threatened to veto Democrat-backed health care legislation if it relies solely on charging employers to provide coverage, while he said he would "absolutely" consider going directly to voters for a health plan if one fails in the Legislature.

The Republican governor, in a meeting with The Bee's editorial board, said he would not approve a plan backed by Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez and Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata as it stands now. Their proposal would require employers to spend 7.5 percent of their payroll on employee health care, while the governor's plan asks hospitals, doctors and employers to contribute.

"One thing I can tell you is that I will not sign a bill -- if anyone over there thinks that I will sign a bill that comes down to me that has only employer mandate, they shouldn't," he said. "I won't sign it. It won't happen. Because we will never have a chance again to go back and cover the rest."

Schwarzenegger said he would consider pursuing a ballot initiative to overhaul the state's health care system if lawmakers do not strike a deal this year. He cited Field Poll numbers showing that 69 percent of California voters are dissatisfied with the current system.

"Well, ballot is always a choice, absolutely," he said. "Because, why not ask the people if they want to go in that direction?"

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