



# No executions on Newsom's watch

New governor declares a moratorium on death penalty

BY LAUREL ROSENHALL / CALMatters

**Gov. Gavin Newsom signed an executive order** last week putting a moratorium on the death penalty in California and shuttering the execution chamber at San Quentin, a move that overrides a decision the state's voters made in 2016 to maintain capital punishment.

While campaigning for governor last year, Newsom said he was fervently opposed to the death penalty but didn't "want to get ahead of the will of the voters" and wanted to "give the voters a chance to reconsider."

On March 13, he said he changed his mind because his decision whether to permit executions had become more urgent and less abstract. The state's lethal injection protocol was getting closer to being finalized and two dozen death row inmates had exhausted their appeals.

"I cannot sign off on executing hundreds and hundreds of human beings," Newsom said at a Capitol press conference.

Under the governor's reprieve, all 737 people on death row will remain in prison and, on paper, sentenced to death. But executions will be halted as long as Newsom remains governor. A future governor would have the power to change their fate.

Newsom's executive order argues that the death penalty is unfair, applied disproportionately to people of color and people with mental disabilities. It says innocent people have been sentenced to die, including five Californians since 1973 who were found to have been wrongfully convicted.

His move is part of a larger swing in California away from tough-on-crime policies. But the death penalty so far has been politically untouchable—repeatedly favored by voters despite their progressive tendencies on other issues. In 2016, California voters passed a ballot measure to expedite executions and defeated a measure to end the death penalty. Voters also defeated a 2012 measure to end the death penalty.

A leading supporter of the death penalty said Newsom's action is legal but "contrary to basic democratic principles."

"The decision of whether we will have the death penalty or not is one the people have made over and over again through the initiative process," said Kent Scheidegger, legal director of the Criminal Justice Legal Foundation, which advocates for capital punishment.

GOP Assemblyman Tom Lackey of Palmdale said Republicans were looking for a way to reverse Newsom's action but hadn't yet figured out how. He criticized Newsom for changing his position from the campaign but ruled out an effort to launch a recall.

It appears Californians may yet have another chance to weigh in.

Democratic Assemblyman Marc Levine of San Rafael has introduced a measure that would, if approved by two-thirds of the Legislature, put the question on the ballot in 2020. He said having a governor campaign against the death penalty could make the difference in convincing voters to repeal it.

Death penalty opponents urged Jerry Brown to grant a reprieve when he was governor, but he never did, despite his personal opposition to capital punishment. They have been lobbying Newsom to do the same since he was sworn-in in January.

Now they have their sights set on the next goal, said longtime anti-death penalty advocate Natasha Minsker: "The next step would be to go further and convert death sentences to life without parole."

**"I cannot sign off on executing hundreds and hundreds of human beings."**

**Gov. Gavin Newsom**

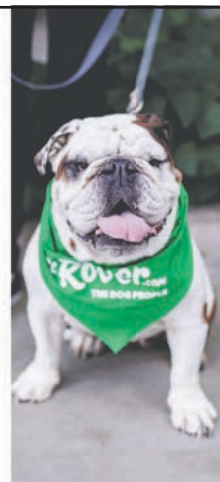
CALMatters.org is a nonprofit, nonpartisan media venture explaining California policies and politics. An unabridged version of this story is available at [newsreview.com/sacramento](http://newsreview.com/sacramento).



## DOG SITTERS WANTED!

Become a dog sitter on Rover and get paid to watch dogs near you.

To get started, visit  
[rover.com/newspaper](http://rover.com/newspaper)



**Can't get enough of our coverage?**

**SN&R EXTRA**

**CHECK OUT OUR NEW BLOG**

[WWW.SACBLOG.NEWSREVIEW.COM](http://WWW.SACBLOG.NEWSREVIEW.COM)



## Your Downtown Service Shop

**SMOG CHECK**

**\$31<sup>75</sup>**

(reg \$49.75) most cars.  
Call for details. Same day.  
Fast In/Out

**OIL CHANGE**

**\$26<sup>99</sup>**

Call for details.

**\$60 EMISSIONS DIAGNOSTIC**

w/repairs at time of service.  
(reg \$120) most cars.  
For renewal reg. only.  
Call for details.

**SMOG**  
DIAGNOSTIC SPECIALISTS



**916 554-6471** 2000 16th St Sacramento  
M-F 7:30-5:30 Sat 8-4  
[sacsmog.com](http://sacsmog.com)



Use your smart phone QR reader for more specials



100% ScanOrLogOn  
[goo.gl/SQAfuu](http://goo.gl/SQAfuu)

**BUY 1 GET 1 1/2 OFF**

Buy any dinner entree at regular price, get the second for HALF OFF! Must present coupon, cannot combine with other discounts. One per table. Valid Mon-Thu only. Expires 04/03/19.

**Bombay**  
Bar and Grill

**Happy Hour**  
Monday-Friday 3-6pm

1315 21st St • Sacramento  
916.441.7100

**SN&R**  
★★★★★  
Voted "Best of Sacramento"  
3 years in a row!