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of dollars in tax hikes last November.

Mar. 18, 2013

California's legislative leaders vowed to act with austerity after voters passed billions of dollars in tax hikes last November.

More than two dozen bills introduced in the current session, however, take aim at Californians' pocketbooks.

Taxes, fees or other charges are proposed for soda pop and sweet tea drinkers, motorists, gun owners and people who frequent strip clubs, buy prepaid cellular phone minutes, or use paper or plastic shopping bags.

Businesses are targeted by proposals ranging from an oil severance tax to a manufacturers fee for mattress recycling, and a crackdown on firms that avoid property tax reassessments after ownership changes.

"It doesn't surprise us at all," Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, said of the numerous bills. "Our elected political class has an insatiable appetite for even more money."

Added Republican Assemblywoman Shannon Grove of Bakersfield: "Did you ever really expect them to keep their word about fiscal restraint?"

Democrats, who are carrying almost all of the bills, are not using their newly won supermajority to push for sales, income or other across-the-board tax hikes. They are targeting narrower groups instead, attempting to alter what they consider harmful habits or bolster services.

Legislative leaders say there's a big difference between crafting a revenue-raising bill

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database, for example, or impose an ignition interlock mandate on convicted drunken drivers.

Other measures would not cost Californians more immediately, but they would extend an existing fee, costing more in the long run.

Assembly Bill 8 would provide an eight-year extension, from 2016 to 2024, for pollution-fighting fees charged as part of vehicle registration.

Looking to the future, a handful of proposed constitutional amendments would ask voters to lower the two-thirds threshold to 55 percent for school parcel taxes and revenue measures for police, fire, library, local transportation, and community and economic development projects.

Assembly Republican leader Connie Conway said the rush of tax and fee bills contradicts the notion that Proposition 30's passage last November would fix California's fiscal problems.

"So was it not true that it was going to fix everything — or are we now breaking a promise that it was going to be enough?" the Tulare lawmaker said.

"It's disingenuous to say that you're going to be austere and then have bills to raise every tax that anyone can think of," Conway added.

Assembly Speaker John A. Perez, D-Los Angeles, said in a written statement that Brown has made it clear he will not raise taxes without a vote of the people.

"He's never equivocated, and we've never asked him to," Perez said.

"It should come as no surprise that many legislators introduced legislation on fees and taxes for a variety of reasons, as they do every year, and they will go through the

legislative process. But at the end of the day, I don't expect to see a flurry of this type

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before it was launched.

Sen. Ted Lieu said in November that he would try to place before voters a tripling of the state's car tax, raising it to the level it was before GOP Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger slashed the rate in 2004.

Lieu, a Torrance Democrat, quickly abandoned the idea when legislative leaders did not embrace it.

The vast majority of Republican lawmakers have signed a national no-new-taxes pledge and aren't carrying major revenue-raising measures.

Republican Sen. Bill Emmerson of Hemet is pushing to close what he considers an ambiguity in current law, however, by proposing a specific fee for copies of medical records: \$30 for search and retrieval, plus 50 cents per page for the first 25 pages. Additional pages would be 25 cents. The fee would rise with inflation.

Some of the most closely watched revenue-raising bills this year may be those designed to alter consumer behavior as well.

Senate Bill 700 would create a 5-cent tax on each paper or plastic bag carried out of grocery stores. Senate Bill 622 would impose a penny-per-ounce tax on soft drinks, sweet teas and energy drinks to "discourage excessive consumption of sweetened beverages by increasing the price of these products and by creating a dedicated revenue source for health programs."

Hedlund, commenting generally about using taxes or fees to change risky behavior, said there are circumstances that justify such action.

"If you have behaviors that are exacerbating health problems, which are in many cases creating health costs that are picked up by taxpayers, that's something to look at," he said.

But Senate GOP leader Bob Huff of Diamond Bar said the Democrat-dominated

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obesity, dental disease and other such programs. Sen. Dan Monning, D-San Diego.

— Senate Bill 700: Impose a 5-cent charge on each paper or plastic single-use shopping bag to raise funds for city and county parks and litter programs. Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis.

— Assembly Bill 760: Impose a tax of 5 cents per bullet on sales of ammunition to raise funds for mental health services. Assemblyman Roger Dickinson, D-Sacramento.

— Senate Bill 782: Impose a \$10-per-person tax on nightclubs, bars and restaurants that combine booze with nude or partially nude entertainment. Funds would be used for sexual assault prevention and treatment. Sen. Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord.

— Senate Bill 391: Impose a \$75 fee for recording various legal documents, such as deeds, default notices and mechanics liens. Property sale documents would be excluded. Funds would be used to support affordable housing. Sen. Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord.

— Assembly Bill 1002: Raise the vehicle registration and renewal fee by \$6. Revenue would be used to encourage use of bicycles, public transportation and pedestrian walkways. Assemblyman Richard Bloom, D-Santa Monica.

— Senate Bill 241: Impose a 9.9 percent oil severance tax on extraction of oil from California lands and water to raise funds for higher education and state parks. Sen. Noreen Evans, D-Santa Rosa.

— Senate Bill 254: Require mattress sellers to offer collection and recycling of used mattresses. Also, authorize an unspecified administrative fee on mattress manufacturers. Sen. Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley.

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