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Friday, May 17, 1990

San Jose Mercury News

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Santa Cruz/
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Helmet bill rode bad data to win

Exhibit "II"

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Lawmaker distorted claims of tax savings

By Bernard Bauer
Mercury News Staff Writer

The author of a motorcycle helmet bill now on Gov. Pete Wilson's desk distorted critical data to win passage of the legislation.

Assemblyman Richard Floyd, D-Gardena, won public and legislative support for his bill by saying the law will save taxpayers \$85 million to \$100 million a year in medical costs for head-injured motorcycle crash victims.

However, both sources cited by Floyd — the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the San Francisco Injury Center for Research and Prevention — denied this week that they provided those numbers to him.

In fact, they said, accurate medical cost figures — or even reliable estimates — do not exist.

"I can't be held responsible for what Floyd does," said Dr. Elizabeth McLaughlin, director of the injury center, which is funded by the Centers for Disease Control.

Don Bischoff, an official at NHTSA's Washington headquarters, said Floyd's statements are "definitely



Floyd: "I don't care what the figures are."

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Exhibit "II"

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BOA Friday, May 17, 1991 • San Jose Mercury News

Officials: Helmet law's tax savings unknown

HELMET BILL, from Page 1A

of time." Bob NITSA, Jerry center support the helmet bill.

McLaughlin and Blumstein said Floyd apparently used estimates they derived for lost wages and related costs for all motorcycle deaths and injuries. Those so-called societal costs — the biggest numbers in the debate — do not represent taxpayer costs for treating accident victims, the officials said.

The helmet bill, which requires motorcycle riders to wear helmets or face fines, passed through the Assembly by one vote on April 1 just before the vote. Floyd said his colleagues in an emotional speech on the Assembly floor had medical costs from treating motorcycle head injuries were decimating county budgets.

"That cost ranges between \$65 million and \$100 million every year in the state of California," he said. "That cost is absorbed by all the county functions."

Analysts produced this week at the request of the Mercury News by the California Office of Public Health, Planning and Development and by NITSA include there is insufficient data to calculate medical cost savings from a helmet law.

The California Highway Patrol doesn't even know how many motorcycle-related head injuries occur

each year.

Asked to comment about statements that he doubts the data to win votes, Floyd said, "The guess is—I don't know what the figures are."

Richard's chief spokesman, Otto Ben, said Thursday that the governor will not Floyd to justify the figures "credibility is important," this said. "We need to make a careful evaluation."

Floyd said Wilson may decide by late today whether to sign or veto the bill. The deadline for a decision is May 28, however, the week introduced the current bill that would the bill failed to check Floyd's figures or conduct body-patched analysis.

Monday reporting by hospitals of injuries, illnesses and medical costs began on July 1, 1990, in California. "The first year in which you could trust (cost estimates) would be 1991," said Gene Hinkle, research manager of the medical care statistics section of the Department of Health Services.

"Floyd seems that to either to get enough support, he had to come up with a big number," said state Sen. Tom Hognes, H. Fishersfield, who led the opposition in

the helmet bill. "The just kind of pulled it out of the air."

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not because of sympathy for motorcycles. "I don't think people really care if someone gets out and gets killed on a motorcycle," Terry said. "It's the same as an automobile. There are so many people that are going to get killed, and that's that."

Although a helmet law has been proposed for California since 1961, the legislature backed widespread support. In addition, the state's 1980s-era year, motorcycle industry routinely opposed laws restricting the freedom of riders.

In the mid-1980s, the attention changed. The Motorcycle Industry Council, tracing declining motorcycle profits to public perceptions about safety, recruited itself and threw its weight behind the helmet bill, according to Alan Harty, president of the organization.

In 1987, the helmet bill made it out of committee for the first time in 25 years.

Floyd's and motorcycle representatives said in interviews this week that they have obtained few details from that Floyd's figures were exaggerated. However, the mainstream media ignored their charges, they said.

Terry, Floyd's aide, admitted in a 1987 article in Motorcycle magazine that the \$65 million figure was exaggerated. Asked in that interview if his team had ever acknowledged the error, Terry replied "No, the really hasn't. I suppose he should."

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