

## Seismic safety delay OK'd

*Legislature -- bill would allow hospitals additional time to make structural fixes.*

**Lien Hoang, Associated Press, 4-8-11**

SACRAMENTO - The disaster in Japan gave state lawmakers some pause Thursday, but they went ahead with legislation to put off the date when hospitals must prove they can survive an earthquake.

The state Assembly passed SB 90, which allows hospitals to apply for a seven-year extension of the deadline to meet seismic safety requirements. The current deadline for most hospitals is 2013.

It now goes to Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown.

The measure will give the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, which regulates seismic compliance, "more tools to scrutinize hospitals on a case-by-case basis, first and foremost on structural safety," said Democratic Assemblyman William Monning of Monterey.

Monning, who presented the bill, said the office would grant extensions based on a hospital's structural integrity, construction budget to meet safety requirements and proximity to other hospitals. Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, a Sacramento Democrat, authored the bill.

But Tom Ammiano, one of three Assembly members who voted against the bill, said Japan's tragedy should make Californians think more carefully about their tectonic stability.

"I hope that in the future, we can have further talks about acts of God and how it should affect what we do here in Sacramento in regards to a state catastrophe," said Ammiano, a Democrat from San Francisco.

The earthquake provision won't take effect unless a separate bill - yet to be introduced - extends the fees that private hospitals pay into Medi-Cal to June 30, 2012. Not all hospitals participate in the state-federal health care program for the poor, but all are required to help fund it.

Those provider fees expired Jan. 1, but another portion of SB 90 renewed them until June 30 this year. That is the date by which the funds must be raised to incur a federal match.

If Brown signs the bill, private hospitals would net \$860 million and the state would save \$50 million in what it would otherwise pay to help fund Medi-Cal. Public hospitals are exempt from the extension.

The added funding could help hospitals that can't afford to make seismic upgrades, which will ultimately cost \$41.7 billion statewide.

A companion bill permitting an intergovernmental transfer to get those funds to hospitals also passed the Assembly and Senate on Thursday. AB 113 also allows district hospitals, which are government-run and don't benefit from the extension, to raise \$33 million in similar Medi-Cal funds.