

# SODA WARNING LABEL STILL ON AGENDA IN CALIFORNIA

Bill dies in committee but supporters say anti-soda legislation is just a matter of time.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA SAFETY WARNING:** Drinking beverages with added sugar(s) contributes to obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay.



Sen. Bill Monning



Harold Goldstein

The effort to pass a recently failed bill requiring health-warning labels on sugar-sweetened beverages in California is a marathon, not a sprint, said sponsoring Sen. Bill Monning.

“While it’s obviously a disappointment that we don’t have an immediate vehicle ... we won’t just lie dormant. We will use 2016 to continue to educate members, and I think the most powerful persuasion for members here (is) in their districts,” Monning told the CrossFit Journal on Jan. 15.

He might be right.

On Jan. 13—the same day Monning withdrew [Senate Bill 203](#) for consideration by the Senate Health Committee—Field Research Corp. released a [statewide poll](#) stating that 78 percent of voters support a warning label on sugary beverages. That’s a [slight increase from 2014](#), when 74 percent of California voters supported such a measure.

Monning, a Democrat from Carmel and the Senate majority leader, first introduced the Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Safety Warning Act in February 2013 as [Senate Bill 1000](#).

The bill passed the Senate but ran out of time during the regular legislative session before the House could consider it. In February 2015, Monning again introduced the act—this time as SB 203. It failed to make it out of the Senate Health Committee.

“I think it’s a tragedy for the democratic process in California, where 78 percent of voters want warning labels and the influence of the American beverage industry has trumped the wishes of California voters.”

—Harold Goldstein



Sen. Monning (second from right) on the future of soda-label legislation: “My intent (is) let’s use the 2016 campaign season to inject it as a campaign issue in California.”

Although Monning didn’t have the votes in the Health Committee to get the legislation to the Senate floor this year, he said he remains cautiously optimistic about 2017, when lawmakers will receive new committee assignments.

“My intent (is) let’s use the 2016 campaign season to inject it as a campaign issue in California,” he said.

After a third consecutive failure, Harold Goldstein called the bill’s death “a tragedy.”

“It’s a tragedy for the health of the people living in California. I think it’s a tragedy for parents who want and need information about sugary beverages so that they can make healthy choices for their children. And I think it’s a tragedy for the democratic process in California, where 78 percent of voters want warning labels and the influence of the American beverage industry has trumped the wishes of California voters.”

Still, the executive director of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy expressed confidence that warning labels on sugary beverages will become a reality in The Golden State.

From his 15 years of experience working on food policy in California, Goldstein said he has found that “the truth wins out, and that when voters want policy change it sometimes takes a while, but it happens.”

A day after Monning withdrew the bill from the Health Committee, the journal [Pediatrics](#) published research saying warning labels on sugar-sweetened beverages improved parents’ understanding of the harmful health effects associated with over-consuming them and “may reduce parents’ purchase of (sugar-sweetened beverages) for their children.”

While Monning’s proposal to add warning labels on sugar-sweetened beverages is the first of its kind in the country, it’s not the only one. New York Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz [last year modeled](#) his proposed Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Safety Warning Act after the California measure. And on Jan. 11, Baltimore City Councilman Nick Mosby [introduced a similar bill](#) with the city’s health commissioner at his side.

“It is our duty as public-health officials to inform individuals, inform our community about it so they can make the best choices

for themselves, for their families,” Dr. Leana Wen, Charm City’s health commissioner, told the CrossFit Journal.

She continued: “You know you’re doing something right when there is such opposition from special-interest groups that do not have the interest of children at heart.”

Big Soda has spent US\$106 million between 2009 and 2015 to defeat public-health initiatives at the local, state and federal levels, according to “[Big Soda vs. Public Health](#),” a report published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

The news that Monning withdrew his bill, representing its third demise, did not dishearten Wen.

“When I hear about examples about what’s happening in California, it gives me even more momentum to do what we’re doing in Baltimore City,” she explained. “We have science, evidence and the best interest of children in our hearts.”

“You can remain resolute against the sugar people and want their role in everyone’s lives diminished, and that’s going to happen.”

—Greg Glassman

For his part, CrossFit Inc. Founder and CEO Greg Glassman remains committed to the cause of getting warning labels on sugary drinks—first in California, then on the East Coast, then nationwide.

“We just gotta get the labels on the can once and it’s gonna be there forever. I don’t know how long it’s going to take, but we’re not done. This is the first skirmish.”

In November, Glassman embarked on a two-week tour of CrossFit affiliate gyms in California to rally support for the bill in the state where his company is headquartered. On tour, [he explained](#) why he wants a warning label on sugary beverages: toxicity, corruption and targeting of CrossFit affiliates.

“Once you realize the significance of this issue, there aren’t a lot of options for you. You can just stop caring, but that’s unusual. You can wait for human physiology to change, but that’s a long wait. You can remain resolute against the sugar people and want their role in everyone’s lives diminished, and that’s going to happen.” ■

## About the Author

Andréa Maria Cecil is assistant managing editor and head writer of the CrossFit Journal.



Harold Goldstein believes warning labels will eventually be a reality in California: “When voters want policy change it sometimes takes a while, but it happens.”

Dave Re/CrossFit Journal