

BAY AREA

AND CALIFORNIA

Davis may not close women's

Political pressure could breathe new life into Live Oak facility

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Under intense pressure from legislators, Gov. Gray Davis has changed his mind about closing California's only minimum-security prison for women, administration officials said.

Details of an 11th-hour deal to keep the Leo Chesney Center in

Live Oak (Sutter County) open for at least one more year are still being hammered out, and must ultimately be approved by legislators and the governor in the new state budget.

But Davis' change of heart — which came three weeks before Leo Chesney was set to close its doors for good — was received as welcome news in Live Oak.

"This is a ninth-inning clutch hit," said Charlie Eggert, Live Oak's mayor, who argued that the prison closure would devastate the economically depressed, rural town. "Now hopefully we can tie the game, at least, or win it."

Leo Chesney was one of five private prisons that Davis proposed closing by June 30 in his budget. While Davis said the closures were intended to save money, critics suggested the move was made to appease the state's prison guards, whose union has been a generous campaign contributor

to Davis.

Two dozen women legislators — all Democrats — and the Republican assemblyman who represents Live Oak have pleaded with Davis to keep Leo Chesney open.

During budget hearings this week, administration officials revealed that the governor would in fact allow Leo Chesney to stay open. The four men's prisons will still be closed.

The joint Senate-Assembly budget conference committee

Eungoo Chong, Kevin Bae and Jong Suk Lee take a break from Korean drum practice at the Korean Youth Cultural Center.



"Koreans need a little space for their own. . . . It's the one place everyone who's Korean goes to."

PETER KIM

Oakland's got Seoul



Photos by MIKE KEPKA / The Chronicle