

## DUI arrest is California Democrats' latest blow

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SACRAMENTO -- Democratic state Sen. Ben Hueso was arrested Friday on suspicion of drunken driving, the latest black eye for the state's majority party and the 40-member chamber that suspended three other Democrats facing legal troubles.

Hueso, 44, of San Diego, was arrested at 2:39 a.m. and booked into Sacramento County Jail, said sheriff's Sgt. Lisa Bowman, after the California Highway Patrol stopped him going the wrong way on a one-way street.

He was released shortly before noon after posting bail of nearly \$1,500 and was expected to appear in court Tuesday.

"I think I have the right to pursue my innocence, and that's what I'm going to do," he told reporters, speaking softly, with a serious expression.

Hueso wore charcoal-gray slacks, a pink-and-white pinstriped dress shirt and black shoes as he walked from the jail to a waiting black van from the Senate's sergeant-at-arms office. He said he would not discuss his whereabouts in the hours before the traffic stop or comment further "until this process is over."

About 30 minutes later, Hueso's office released a statement from the senator that seemed to contradict his comments to reporters as he left the jail: "I accept complete personal responsibility for my actions and any punishments that ultimately come my way as a result of this incident."

Hueso's July newsletter to constituents included a Highway Patrol safety tip that driving after drinking is a "critical mistake."

His seat was vacant when the Senate reconvened Friday, a week before the legislative deadline. The end of the legislative session, when lawmakers pass hundreds of bills, is typically a festive time after hours, with parties and fundraisers at bars and restaurants.

Hueso was among the guests at a dinner hosted Thursday by the Latino Legislative Caucus at a restaurant in downtown Sacramento, but the event ended about 9 p.m., said Roger Salazar, a spokesman for the caucus.

A photograph posted to Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez's Twitter account late Thursday night with the message, "Yes ... Loving my Latino Caucus boys" shows Hueso and four other lawmakers, several with drinks in their hands, hamming it up inside the state Capitol.

Gonzalez's tweet was later deleted. When asked about the photograph Friday morning, Gonzalez said, "I have nothing to say" and then dashed into an elevator.

Other lawmakers who appeared in the photograph declined to comment.

Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg said he was dismayed by the arrest.

"It's a lapse of personal judgment, and I'm only glad that no one was hurt," Steinberg said.

He said it was too early to say whether Hueso would face discipline from the Senate.

"Driving under the influence is not only against the law, it puts people in serious danger, and that's not acceptable," Steinberg said.

California lawmakers have taken steps this year to repair their image in the wake of the legal trouble and suspension of the three Democratic senators. Sen. Rod Wright, of Inglewood, was convicted for lying about living in his district, while Sens. Ron Calderon, of Montebello, and Leland Yee, of San Francisco, are fighting unrelated federal corruption charges.

This week, lawmakers approved legislation that would outlaw gifts from lobbyists, reduce the annual overall gift limit for lawmakers from \$440 to \$200, and ban the most extravagant types of gifts, such as sports and concert tickets, for elected officials and legislative staff.

The Legislature also approved a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow lawmakers to be suspended without pay. That measure will appear on the ballot in 2016.

Hueso was driving a state-owned Ford Fusion available for out-of-town lawmakers alone when officers spotted him heading north on southbound 15th Street, California Highway Patrol Officer Julie Powell said. He made a U-turn and headed in the correct direction before officers pulled him over, Powell said.

Hueso, elected to the Senate in a 2013 special election, faces a re-election challenge from a fellow Democrat, Rafael Estrada, in November. His biography on his Senate website says he is married with four sons.

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Associated Press writers Judy Lin and Don Thompson contributed to this report.