

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Editorial: Don't blow chance to scuttle redevelopment agencies

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The vote on Gov. Jerry Brown's plan to end redevelopment agencies was still open Tuesday, so there was still some hope that these noxious local fiefdoms can be shut down, but so far Republican Assembly members had been a major disappointment on the issue. The bill was one-vote shy of the two-thirds majority needed for passage and only Republican, Chris Norby of Fullerton, had voted "aye."

Redevelopment is the epitome of big government at the local level. There are about 400 active agencies statewide, and they routinely abuse eminent domain, run up debt without a public vote and micromanage land-use decisions in cities. Redevelopment agencies were formed in the 1940s to combat blighted urban cores, but they now function mainly to

entice developers to build sales-tax-generating big-box stores and auto malls. It's corporate welfare mated with government abuses of power.

Jerry Brown hasn't gotten many things right since taking over as governor. And his legislative Democratic allies almost always get things wrong, also, given their endless push to expand government, regulate businesses and raise taxes. Nevertheless, in their zeal to close a budget hole, the state's Democrats proposed zeroing out redevelopment and grabbing \$1.7 billion from them. The Brown administration noted that redevelopment's claims of reviving cities are overblown. We were heartened by his proposal, whatever the rationale.

This should have been a no-brainer for Republicans, who claim to be for free markets, limited government, fiscal responsibility and property rights. Redevelopment agencies are about bureaucratic priorities rather than the marketplace. They are about big government, fiscal irresponsibility and they routinely abuse property rights. We've heard nothing but lame excuses from Republican Assembly members, including members of the Orange County delegation.

Some Republicans defend redevelopment, or at least argue that, whatever the system's flaws, it is done right in their home cities. Others argue that redevelopment keeps money in the local economy rather than sending it off to Sacramento. Still others view it as a pro-business policy that helps California compete with other states. Others told us that they simply don't trust the Democrats and that, essentially, anything they overwhelmingly support can't be good. The final argument is that the legislation would create successor agencies that would likely advance the power of local unions through project labor agreements and other rules.

Given the disparate and easily debunked reasons, we suspect that Republicans mainly wanted to deprive Brown of any budget victory, even in the one area where he happened to be on the right track.

Redevelopment is a bad system of central planning. Even in those cities where successful projects have emerged, it is a problematic policy that runs up debt and runs small property owners off of their land in order to benefit politically well connected developers. This might keep the money "at home," but that's no excuse for it. Republicans should favor free markets, which are quite different from "pro-business" policies, the latter of which often mean using government to give special favors to specific businesses.

Republicans always are wise to be skeptical of Democratic plans, but if one takes the argument that Democrats can never get anything right in any circumstance, then one must accept that Republicans can never accomplish

anything beyond obstruction. That's one of the most cynical attitudes we've come across. It's true that the successor agencies will have problems, but it's best to kill the beast while there's a chance to do so. Those agencies are set up simply to dispose of redevelopment debt and finish off redevelopment projects. Besides, it's wrong to let the perfect become the enemy of the good.

"The governor has put redevelopment agencies on the chopping block," Orange County Republican Party Chairman Scott Baugh told us. "If Republicans have some concerns about the successor agencies, they should address those concerns but not miss the opportunity to eliminate localized socialism."

Orange County residents should contact GOP Assembly members Jim Silva, Don Wagner, Diane Harkey, Jeff Miller, Allan Mansoor (who has been neutral) and Curt Hagman and ask them why they hadn't voted to end these wasteful and abusive agencies.

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