



Protecting citizens, land from government abuse

The act will protect property from being condemned and seized for private development

Doug Mosebar

Guest Comment

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For family farmers and ranchers, it's all about the land. Our land - and the soil, water and climate attached to it - forms the very basis of what we do. It houses our homes, it provides our source of income and it provides a source of satisfaction as we care for our natural resources.

Because we are so close to the land, when something threatens it, we take that very seriously. And there's a threat out there that needs to be addressed. It worries California farmers but it started with government action against homeowners in Connecticut.

Those homeowners had their land and property taken by the city government, through a process known as "eminent domain." The city then turned around and granted the property to a developer who wanted to build a conference hotel and shopping area.

The homeowners sued, but the U.S. Supreme Court said the city could do what it did, basically because the law didn't prevent it. For good reason, the Kelo case, as it came to be known, provoked a public outcry. It's just not right that the government can seize your property and give it to someone else.

No fewer than 41 states reformed their eminent-domain laws to prevent this abuse of power - but not California.

We aim to change that.

The California Farm Bureau Federation, the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association and the California Alliance to Protect Private Property Rights are co-sponsoring a ballot measure to stand up to government eminent-domain abuses. We're working to qualify it for the ballot next June.

We call our measure the California Property Owners and Farmland Protection Act. In a direct response to the Kelo ruling, it will protect all properties from being condemned and seized for private development.

Because farmland usually doesn't cost as much to seize as residential or commercial property, farmers fear they will be particularly vulnerable to eminent-domain abuses.

We recognize that there are times when government has a legitimate reason to take property, for a true public purpose such as a police station, a school or a highway.

But our measure would make sure that when government takes land for such a purpose, it compensates the landowner for relocation expenses, temporary business losses and other reasonable expenses.

There are powerful special interests in California who don't want this type of reform. That's why we're among the few states that haven't already reacted to the Kelo ruling. And that's why it will take an initiative from the people to put this reform into our state constitution.

Learn more about our initiative at www.yesonpropertyrights.com.

Whether it's your farm, your ranch, your home, your business, your place of worship or any other private property, it deserves all the protection that the law can provide. In California, it's not getting that protection now.

I invite you to join us in protecting our land and property.

Doug Mosebar, a farmer from Santa Ynez, is president of the California Farm Bureau Federation.