Modesto Bee Editorial: Three bills for the governor to kill

August 19, 2014

October is the usual month for ghosties and ghoulies for most of the country. But in Sacramento, the waning days of the legislative session in August are the scariest time of all.

It is when dead legislation comes back to life – call them zombie bills – in strange and terrifying forms; when good bills are mutilated into monsters; and when powerful people embrace crazy ideas to nightmarish ends.

This year is no exception. Below are three examples of particularly horrific legislation that we urge the governor to stake through the heart should they somehow shamble into his office:

All praise the fearless leader

Reasonable people can agree that the election of Barack Obama as the first African American president of the United States in 2008 was historic and a watershed moment for racial equality. Any teacher worth his or her salt would no doubt point that out to students in their American history classes. But Assemblyman Chris Holden, D-Pasadena, seeks to write that into law with Assembly Bill 1912.

No legislative body – not even a school board – should be in the business of telling a teacher exactly how to teach a subject, especially when it comes with so many partisan overtones. That might be de rigueur in dictatorships, where the fearless leader must be praised, but a free country must fight attempts at thought control.

Most frightening of all, this bill has no formal opposition. Even the California Teachers Association is supporting it, though the very idea must be repugnant to any teacher who values academic freedom or simply wants to write her or his own lesson plan.

The scarlet letter

Senate Bill 556 is an example of a deceased legislation rising from the grave. This labor-backed bill prohibits private contractors for public agencies from using the logos of those public agencies on vehicles or uniforms (think ambulances and emergency medical technicians) for which they work – unless they also wear a disclosure that they are not public employees. It’s more camp than horror to imagine the uniform badges that might result from such rules.

Originally carried by Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, in 2013, it languished until Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Pacoima, decided to reanimate it this year. For what nefarious purpose, we can only guess. Padilla is running for secretary of state and will need the support of labor in a tough fight against Republican Pete Peterson.
California legislators should keep to state business, out of local negotiations: Editorial

Thursday, August 21, 2014

California’s Legislature has enough state business to handle — or mishandle, critics might say. Yet legislators insist on sticking their noses into local-government affairs.

And we’re not talking about the big stuff of the past few years, such as inmate realignment or raided local redevelopment funds and then closing the whole system down.

No, we’re referring to legislators inserting themselves into the authority and financial affairs of local governments where there’s no need whatsoever to do so — other than pandering to the union interests that support the legislators’ campaigns.

Let’s consider just two of several still-active bills that would harm local government agencies’ ability to serve their constituents by being frugal with their tax money.

Assembly Bill 2126 by Assemblyman Rob Bonta, R-Oakland, would tilt collective-bargaining negotiations toward employee unions in a big way.

Bonta’s bill applies to mediation in contract negotiations that cities, counties and other public agencies engage in with their public employees. As it stands now, when a city and one of its employee unions haven’t been able to agree on a contract, they can agree to appoint a mediator. But AB 2126 would allow either party to require mediation, and then if they fail to agree on a mediator within five days, either party can ask the Public Employee Relations Board to appoint one.

But, as the League of California Cities points out, a PERB-appointed mediator is likely to be sympathetic to public employees’ point of view.

The bill also would allow PERB to insert itself into any aspect of the contract — not just the part that resulted in the negotiating impasse — and to choose which criteria to consider, rather than looking at a full range of factors as is required now. That means the mediator could focus only on comparing wages, hours and conditions with those of other agencies and ignore, for example, the city’s financial condition.

Those changes would be quite advantageous to public employee unions, which support the bill, and bad for local governments — read, taxpayers — which oppose it.

Senate Bill 556, by Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Los Angeles, is downright silly.

It prohibits any contractor performing health or safety work for a public agency from displaying on a uniform or vehicle the logo of that agency without displaying prominently on the uniform or vehicle a “disclosure statement” that the service is being provided by the contractor. The bill even specifies that the disclosure
must be in the same location and just as prominent as the logo of the public agency.

Padilla, whose bill is sponsored by the California Labor Federation and the California Professional Firefighters, says it’s important for the public to be able to distinguish between public employees and contract employees. We don’t see why.

Opponents claim, accurately, that it’s a solution in search of a problem. Ambulance companies, for example, would incur extra costs to redesign uniforms and repaint ambulances, and those costs would, of course, be passed along to contracting cities and other agencies, and then to taxpayers.

Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed similar legislation last year. If SB 556 gets to his desk, he should do it again.

And legislators should stay out of the affairs of local governments and their employees.

URL:

Logo legislation imposes obstacles on local governments: Guest commentary

While California is trying to recover economically and facing the biggest drought in history, people in the Capitol are haggling over a bill describing what badges contractors working for local agencies are allowed to wear on their uniforms and whether they need disclaimers painted on their trucks.

Senate Bill 556, by Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Los Angeles, would prohibit contracted employees from displaying a public agency’s logo on a uniform or vehicle unless there is a disclaimer clarifying the worker is not an employee of the public agency.

Let’s assume the bill’s union supporters are doing more than imposing obstacles for cash-strapped local agencies seeking to reduce costs, and maximize taxpayer dollars by contracting health and public safety services.

We will even assume that there isn’t an effort to discourage the use of contracted employees, though it should be noted that this past spring, labor groups sponsored House Resolution 29, a nonbinding measure that saw a majority of lawmakers pledge to oppose the “outsourcing of public services and assets.”

All that aside, one can certainly imagine situations in which it’s helpful for the public to know who is a full-time public servant and who is employed by a contractor. We all appreciate knowing the difference between a sworn police officer and a mall security guard. Fair enough.

However, the bill’s vague language and ambiguous intent creates some unease, as it could be seen as a step toward advancing measures that would prohibit local governments from hiring private companies altogether.

SB 556 imposes unnecessary financial and administrative obstacles on local governments struggling to provide basic services. These agencies should retain the flexibility to deliver services in the most cost-efficient manner.

SB 556 distracts from deeper, more pressing matters.

Rather than debating the lettering stenciled onto a truck or the size of badges pinned on uniforms, legislators should be fighting for funds that help provide essential public services, protect residents, and create a better quality of life in our communities.

Steven Ly is a Rosemead City Council member and president of the Los Angeles County Division of the League of California Cities.
Fifth circle of review hell

The California Environmental Quality Act requirements are so oppressive to development that lawmakers regularly ease them for projects they favor. Sacramento’s downtown arena now under construction benefited from such a bill last year.

Most people agree that CEQA, while good policy, needs some reforming. But the kind offered up in Assembly Bill 52 by Assemblyman Mike Gatto, D-Los Angeles, is not reform that improves the process. This bill would add more hurdles for development by including a new potential environmental impact to be mitigated – whether the project affects the “sacred places” or “cultural resources” of American Indian tribes. The definition is left so open-ended it would add a new layer of anxiety to what is already a horror movie of an environmental review process.

These are just three particularly gruesome bills limping around the Capitol halls, but by no means the only monstrosities to be found this year. We haven’t even gotten to the Confederate flag ban, another bill meddling with history curriculum requiring that students be schooled in various genocides from Rwanda to Armenia, and the stinker that is Senate Bill 1139 – the California Renewables Portfolio Standard Program. Stay tuned for Nightmare on L Street, Part 2.