

A 'grand slam' for big government

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In 1998, I voted against Proposition 10, which imposed a 50-cent tax on tobacco products to fund early childhood education programs. It passed anyway.

In 2000, I voted for an initiative to repeal Proposition 10. It was pummeled.

My votes stem from my opposition to increasing taxes and inserting government into areas where it shouldn't be present.

For the same reasons, I oppose Republican state Sen. Dave Cox's "Grand Slam for California" proposal to abolish Proposition 10 programs.

Why, given my consistent opposition to Proposition 10? Simple: Sen. Cox's proposal doesn't repeal the Proposition 10 tobacco tax, but diverts those billions into expanding our already swollen state government!

Contrary to Cox's assertions, his proposal is the opposite of a responsible, conservative Republican approach to mending our state government's chronic fiscal crisis.

As a conservative, I inherently trust decentralized local governments more than a larger, more centralized government. Larger government can do more harm and be less flexible, and Cox's proposal only rewards California's uncontrolled spending.

Some background: Proposition 10 taxes tobacco products to fund early development programs targeting children in the first five years of life; 20 percent of the funds go to the state "First 5" commission; 80 percent go to 58 county "First 5" commissions, such as the Children and Families Commission of San Bernardino County, on the

basis of birth rates. County commissions are appointed by and responsible to their local county supervisors.

In other words, revenues are collected statewide but spent primarily by local bodies. While San Francisco's First 5 Commission has rightly come under fire for some foolish expenditures, the second largest First 5 Commission - in Orange County - consistently receives top marks for effectiveness and efficiency from the Orange County grand jury and the praise of local Republican legislators.

I'd prefer there were no Proposition 10 tobacco tax, but at least the funds are being allocated at the county level, close to the people, rather than concentrated in a remote state bureaucracy.

Enter Sen. Cox, a harsh critic of Proposition 10. Instead of repealing Proposition 10, Cox wants to use nearly \$600 million per year to add 200,000 children to the Healthy Families state health insurance program.

Yes, Sen. Cox proposes making more people dependent on our deficit-ridden state government, and doing so with declining tobacco tax revenues.

Isn't that how the state government got itself in this budget crisis?

The local Proposition 10 commissions have built up \$2.4 billion in fund balances. They've socked away money to ensure multi-year funding for local programs.

Saving now to ensure funds are available for future needs - you and I would recognize that as responsible financial planning. Sen. Cox apparently sees it as an opportunity for irresponsible financial planning by seizing the money and dishing it out to local governments, effectively trying to buy their support for his plan.

State government has a problem - a spending addiction. The "spendocrats" in charge are out of money and desperately rifling through the house of state looking for more.

If an alcoholic on a bender ran out of liquor, would you put him in rehab? Or give him your savings and send him to BevMo to buy more booze? Sen. Cox's proposal is the fiscal equivalent of sending the drunk to the liquor store.

Government in California is too big, too centralized and it spends too much. Republicans are supposed to be the party devoted to making

government smaller, less centralized and less expensive, a detail Sen. Cox and some of his colleagues need to remember.

I opposed Proposition 10, and support its repeal. But as long as it is on the books, keeping those revenues in the hands of local commissions accountable to the local citizenry is vastly preferable for this anti-tax conservative than turning it over to the Sacramento "spendocracy."

Republican legislators can best serve California with conservative proposals to reduce the scope of government and the number of people dependent on it - not trumpeting gimmicky proposals that accomplish the opposite.

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