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In The Bag With ABAG

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Not A Plan, But A Trap

Assemblyman John T. Knox of Richmond hasn't satisfied anyone in our county by his proposal to revise the original boundaries of his recommended Bay Area Regional Organization (BARO) to coincide with those of the Bay Area Regional Water Quality Control Board.

It's a contrived device to minimize growing opposition to his plan to create a limited regional government embracing the nine Bay Region counties by applying the old tactic of "divide and conquer." By reducing the original BARO area to exclude the northern sections of Solano, Napa and Sonoma counties and the eastern portions of Alameda and Contra Costa counties, Knox sees an opportunity to achieve piecemeal what may be impossible to acquire as a whole.

Solano County wants no part of this scheme any more than it has any desire to become involved

in any mandated form of super-government at the cost of subordinating its right to determine its own future to the will of a more populous combination of counties with which we have no homogeneity of interests.

Assemblyman Knox' new plan not only is unrealistic but shortsighted. Affiliation with the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) virtually is mandatory for cities and counties seeking federal grants because their applications to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) first must be reviewed by ABAG. Should the geographically abbreviated BARO replace ABAG as planned, how then will those portions of Solano and Napa counties excluded from BARO qualify for HUD aid?

No, Mr. Knox, we can't buy it. We're just not interested in a divided Solano County.

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01/28/79

State moves to gain new power over cities

By Gale Cook
Examiner Capitol Bureau

SACRAMENTO — Enormous powers to push consolidation of cities, counties, special districts and other agencies would be established in a bill now before the Legislature.

The contiguous cities of Oakland and Berkeley or Millbrae and San Bruno, for example, could be ordered to put consolidation to a vote of the people, even if the city councils objected.

If the matter were not submitted to voters upon order of a local agency formation commission (LAFCO), the penalty would be drastic: loss of the cities' share of the countywide property tax levy.

This is the nub of Assembly Bill 287 by Assemblyman John Knox, D-Richmond. The co-author is Sen. Milton Marks, R-San Francisco.

And Knox said that, before he gets through amending the bill, voting on LAFCO-proposed reorganizations and consolidations

might be a condition for receiving Proposition 13 state bailout funds as well.

"My intention is to work that out as part of the plan," he said. "I figure at a time when we are handing out this money we might make it conditional.

"Local government is very expensive and much of it is unnecessary," Knox said. He noted that in the last decade only two city mergers have occurred — San Jose-Alviso and Sacramento-North Sacramento.

Knox said that, to his surprise, the League of California Cities has indicated it favors working to merge some cities.

It is even possible, he said, that the bill would provide for studies that would lead in time to a vote by adjacent counties on consolidation — counties such as San Francisco and San Mateo, for instance.

Every California county except San Francisco, a county-city government, has a LAFCO as a result of Knox-sponsored legislation

adopted in 1963.

LAFCOs, usually composed of two supervisors, two council members or a council member and a mayor, and one public member, presently have power to approve or disapprove new agencies or special districts, annexations, detachments, consolidations and reorganizations. But they cannot initiate a proposal.

The Knox bill would change that. LAFCOs would be empowered to conduct reorganization studies of local agencies, including counties, cities, districts — every entity, in fact, except the state, the University of California, and school and community college districts.

The language of the measure is in line with views of the Post Commission, Gov. Brown, Assembly Speaker Leo McCarthy, D-San Francisco, and others who have noted the costly proliferation of local government agencies.

"The purpose of this article," the bill says, "is to promote efficiency in local government by putting before the voters reorganization

plans that have been carefully studied by locally responsible individuals and projected to result in significant cost savings."

After study, a LAFCO would recommend a reorganization plan to affected local agencies — possibly merger or consolidation. Any agency that did not approve submitting the plan to the voters would get no property tax money the next fiscal year.

"The Legislature intends that local agencies, as a condition of receiving property tax revenues, shall demonstrate a willingness to allow voters to consider organizational alternatives," the bill declares.

Knox's bill, as now drafted and awaiting hearing before the Assembly Committee on Local Government, would appropriate \$2 million to Gov. Brown's Office of Planning and Research. This would be allocated to LAFCOs for their reorganization studies.

Counties obviously would incur some costs — holding elections, for example — but the bill disclaims any local expense.

Bill Press, director of OPR, said AB287 is not an administration bill but is consistent with Gov. Brown's "urban strategy."

The bill carries an urgency clause declaring, "It is necessary that local agencies be reorganized at the earliest possible time. With two-thirds approval by the Assembly and Senate, the bill would become effective immediately, possibly affecting property tax and bailout distribution in the fiscal year beginning July 1.