

Opinion: How to dilute the power of politicians

By Steven Greenut

SACRAMENTO – When I lived in Iowa, I was an average citizen, and, one day, I had a question for the governor’s office for an article I was writing for a small newsletter. I called the Capitol number and was transferred to an aide, who responded with something to this effect: “Why don’t you come and ask the governor yourself? Are you free next Monday at 11:30?”

When I got there at 11:30, the governor was waiting and gave me a half-hour of his time.

Getting an audience with Gov. Jerry Brown – or any other recent California governor – would be nearly impossible for an average citizen, and, indeed, it is tough enough to get such access even for someone writing for a major newspaper. The chief executive of a state with 39 million people – especially a state wrestling with a \$26.6 billion budget deficit – usually won’t have time for Molly from Modesto, even if the governor of a state with 3 million people might occasionally be able to meet with Steve from Des Moines.

But while it’s unrealistic to expect average voters to get a visit with their governor, they should have a chance to meet with their state representative. Unfortunately, California’s residents have only a slim chance of meeting with their Assembly members, the ones who are supposed to be the people’s advocates.

Iowans, for instance, are represented by 103 members of the House of Representatives, whereas Californians are represented by 80 members of the Assembly. Simple math: There’s one representative for every 29,151 Iowans (using 2008 data) and one Assembly member for every 459,458 Californians (now

483,000). There's an elected representative in New Hampshire's house for every 3,290 Granite State residents, the lowest ratio of such representation in the nation.

I gave a talk last weekend at the state Libertarian Party Convention at Lake Tahoe. I spoke about the failure of California Republicans and focused on the party's failure to end redevelopment agencies. Activist Michael Warnken approached me afterward and handed me the above data. He said it made his point that the continuation of redevelopment, which Gov. Brown wants to end, is a "representation problem."

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