

Opinion: Demand California adhere to Brown Act

By Dan Tatzin

I do not envy the challenge facing California's legislators and Gov. Jerry Brown. The bursting of the housing bubble, high unemployment, reduced property values and the never-ending Great Recession, coupled with the rising cost of government, have triggered a financial debacle from which state government may not recover for a decade. Even in difficult times, however, state officials should not forget the words of the Declaration of Independence: "Governments ... [derive] their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Pursuant to that spirit, in 1953 California adopted the Ralph M. Brown Act, which demanded that lawmakers make decisions openly and deliberate before the public. "The people of this State," states the act, "do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created."

Our lawmakers have seemingly forgotten these commands.

In what was billed as a cost-saving move, the Legislature and the governor recently suspended portions of the Brown Act – specifically those ordering local governments to post notices of public meetings in advance.

Don Tatzin is a member of the Lafayette City Council, which will continue to follow the Brown Act.

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