

EDITORIAL: Fundraising timeout would be good for California

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By The Fresno Bee Editorial Board

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No one reasonably expects to get money, and the influence of those who have it, out of politics. But it is possible to slow the flow in the pipeline between campaign contributions, fundraising parties and legislation in California.

A fundraising blackout during the final, critical days of the legislative session would help.

A blackout is proposed as part of a package of four bills introduced last week by state Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Los Angeles, who is running for secretary of state.

Senate Bill 1101 would ban fundraising by legislators in the final 100 days of the legislative session and for seven days after the session ends. This is when much of the political pressure is applied on critical legislation such as the state budget and the high-stakes bills that generally appear in the last days of each session.

This time limit may be crucial to attracting support in the Senate or Assembly. One of the main criticisms when fundraising blackouts were proposed in the past was that they would make it difficult for less affluent legislators to raise money for campaigns against wealthy challengers. While that discounts the pricelessness of the incumbent's advantage, it does deflate the argument because much of the year is open to soliciting funds.

The other three bills in the package would require that contributions of more than \$100 be reported electronically within 24 hours of receipt if fewer than 90 days before an election, and within five days at any other time; would mandate the electronic reporting of campaign-funded communications within 24 hours; and would limit candidates from raising money for more than one seat at a time.

These are all good-government ideas, but the fundraising blackout offers the best potential to stop the proliferation of legalized corruption in the Capitol.

The case of lobbyist Kevin Sloat offers a good example of why. Sloat was hit with a record fine — \$133,500 — by the Fair Political Practices Commission this month for holding lavish fundraising parties at his house with fine cigars and finer wine that far exceeded the \$500 limit for such events.

In announcing the bill package, Padilla said this would "reduce the likelihood of an unseemly overlap of public policy and campaign contributions." Presumably, he should know. He was one of 37 state lawmakers who received FPPC warning letters for holding political fundraisers at Sloat's home — in Padilla's case, during the legislative session.

Padilla's proposal faces an uphill battle to get support. We wish him luck.

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