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THE VOICE OF THE WEST

EDITORIALS

Davis teaches a lesson

GOV. GRAY Davis has sensibly put a bad idea to rest. He won't support a bill giving teacher unions a major say in textbook selection, curriculum choice and other classroom issues.

The measure is a power grab disguised as educational reform. Right now, teachers can bargain for wages, fringe benefits and working conditions. The bill targeted by Davis would mix critical educational choices with labor bargaining.

At first glance, it's an appealing notion. Teachers must be enthusiastic about what they teach. Tapping front-line knowledge about what works to boost reading and math scores is important.

But mixing pedagogy and wages is a recipe for disaster. First, collective bargaining takes place behind closed doors, shutting out parents and the public. Are decisions about classroom content best reached during table-pounding labor talks?

Secondly, administrators and elected school board members lose accountability. If voters think schools are performing poorly, they can toss out the leadership right now. Giving teachers a hammerlock on courses and textbooks confuses the picture and introduces another major player beyond the public's reach. The public will reasonably wonder who's in charge if this bill becomes law.

Third, it's a needless turf war. Teachers already have the right to suggest changes in books and programs. The measure's prime sponsor, the California Teachers Association, claims such input is often ignored. If that's the case, let the teachers tell the world and persuade the public to pressure a school board. This voice of knowledge and experience is power enough already. The remedy is not expanding the union's clout.

The measure, AB2160, was carried by Assemblywoman Jackie Goldberg, a Los Angeles Democrat, who is a former teacher and school board member. She wants to force hidebound administrators to take teachers' suggestions seriously.

It's a worthwhile point, but the bill is overkill. Hardening the points of view by making textbook selection a bargaining chip between labor and management won't help kids learn

any better.

Davis' stand puts him at odds with a bedrock labor ally in an election year. The teachers' union, with 300,000 members, donated \$1.3 million to his campaign in 1998.

It's a gratifying sign that Davis, who has emphasized education, is willing to break with his supporters on an important issue. He should resist any efforts to recast the bill that still surrenders crucial choices to closed-door decisionmaking.

*The governor
rightly rejects a
power grab by the
teachers union.*
