Left-Leaning Groups Rally Against Legislative Power—With a Little Help From the GOP

There was a man-bites-dog aspect to the news last week when a bill mainly opposed by groups on the left, man associated with the Democratic Party, was apparently killed by Republican legislators.

While the surface story of man-bites-dog is interesting there is a larger context to the bill’s demise involving the current struggle within the Democratic Party and its allies between the establishment and what one might call the insurgents who argue for a level playing field.

[AB 84](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB84), amending the Political Reform Act of 1974, would allow for newly created legislative caucus committees to be treated like political party committees allowing for much larger political contributions to be controlled by the Speaker of the Assembly, Assembly Minority Leader, President Pro Tempore of the Senate and Senate Minority Leader.

If there is an opponent of the bill listed among the dozens of groups opposed that could be considered on the right, I didn’t see one. The opposition is made up of left leaning and Democratic groups including the state Democratic Party itself along with a number of the local Indivisible organizations, environmental groups, the League of Women Voters, California Common Cause and others on the left.

However, the bill requires a two-thirds vote to pass and the Republican Senate Caucus sent a [message Friday](https://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article217292200.html) to legislative leadership that the caucus opposes the bill meaning the two-thirds vote is unlikely to be attained.

Supporters of the bill argue it will provide more transparency to political fundraising. However, opponents see a sinister play to buck up the establishment in the candidate process.

Legislative leaders are expected to protect incumbents and help them against any challenges. A larger political war chest can help leaders support their troops. The California Democratic Party objected to the proposed system allowing leaders to bypass endorsements made by party delegates at conventions.

Even in the [bill’s analysis support](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB84) for the measure is expressed so that leaders can ensure that “serious-minded, thoughtful party candidates get elected and stay elected.” Presumably, that would be candidates loyal to the leaders and would make it easier to stonewall insurgent candidates from the same party.

Ironically, AB 84 comes at a time that national Democrats changed the rules on [Super Delegates at party conventions](https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/25/politics/democrats-superdelegates-voting-changes/index.html). The automatic, unpledged party leaders that make up the contingent of Super Delegates at the presidential nominating convention will no longer be allowed to vote on the first ballot. This change resulted from a rebellion of rank and file party members who object to the influence of the party establishment in the candidate selection process.

The Democratic organizations opposition to AB 84 comes in a similar vein.

While the story of AB 84 appears to be man-bites-dog, in the end it is more an old-fashioned internal dogfight over political power.