

Editorial | Stumbo must end fight over vetoes

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(Photo: Jonathan Palmer/Special to The Courier-Journal)

House Speaker Greg Stumbo is grandstanding. Plain and simple. And it's time to bring an end to it.

Like a schoolyard brawler, the Democrat wants to shove back against Republican Gov. Matt Bevin seemingly just to make a point. Stumbo has said [he may file a lawsuit to challenge some of the vetoes](http://story/news/politics/ky-governor/2016/04/29/stumbo-questions-validity-governors-vetoes/83710344/) ([//story/news/politics/ky-governor/2016/04/29/stumbo-questions-validity-governors-vetoes/83710344/](http://story/news/politics/ky-governor/2016/04/29/stumbo-questions-validity-governors-vetoes/83710344/)) Bevin issued after the recent General Assembly session. At issue is whether Bevin's signature is valid and whether the failure to give reasons for some vetoes meets the requirements of the Kentucky Constitution. But in this case, something more is at risk than making his point.

We'll admit it: The Courier-Journal and newspapers across the commonwealth have a vested interest in a pair of line-item vetoes among those being questioned by Stumbo, but so should every citizen interested in transparency in government.

With the stroke of his pen (or auto-pen, as the case may be), Bevin took a stand for openness that we wholeheartedly applaud and would hate to see trumped by Stumbo's pettiness. Among his vetoes, Bevin struck from the budget bill two sections that would have allowed local governments and school districts to keep their financial statements from the brightest light of day. Instead of publishing the financials in their local newspaper, local governments and school districts could merely post them online or place a copy in a public library under the language inserted in the budget bill but removed by Bevin.

In addition to reducing public access to the information, an end to the practice of print publication of financials could have severely crippled many smaller newspapers, resulting in fewer journalists and even the loss of a few newspapers -- the very watchdogs needed to keep an eye on those local governments and school districts.

And Bevin's line-item veto wasn't just a stand for transparency, it also was a stand against tricky behind-closed-doors maneuvering among legislators -- in this case one from his own party. You see, the language on local government financials was snuck into the budget bill while it was being hammered out by a conference committee before the massive legislation was presented to the House and Senate for a last-second vote. The language on school board financials has a similar history of sneaky dealing dating back 12 years.

We're not sure Bevin should even have to explain why openness in government is worthy of exercising his veto power. But perhaps entrenched politicians like Stumbo need to hear an explanation. So, we've given him one. Now, let it lie.

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