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Tribune Editorial: Herbert should veto this horrid land-grab bill



(Francisco Kjolseth | The Salt Lake Tribune) Mayor Jackie Biskupski holds a presser at the City County building on Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2018, to speak out against SB234 as written, which creates the Utah Inland Port Authority, saying it deprives the city of local control in taxing and land use decisions.

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Gov. Gary Herbert should not use his veto pen on Senate Bill 234, the Utah Inland Port Authority bill.

No, he should find a large, red marker — or maybe a can of the sort of spray paint used by graffiti artists in urban areas — and obliterate a measure that seeks to unreasonably grab power and money away from the duly elected officials whose lawful responsibility it is to oversee the orderly development of Salt Lake City.

In their wisdom, both houses of the Utah Legislature have adopted a bill that seeks to overlay a large, mostly undeveloped, section of what's known as the city's Northwest Quadrant with a new, overly powerful and totally unnecessary layer of government.

The new authority would be a run by a board, a board populated mostly by appointees of various state officials and agencies, with some input from Salt Lake County and West Valley City and — quite purposefully, it would seem — next to no

pull for Salt Lake City.

This super-agency would have the power to buy and sell land, raise, borrow and spend money and, whenever a would-be developer might feel unfairly constrained by any city zoning, land-use or environmental restriction, grant exemptions from same.

Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski strongly opposed the measure, as did members of her City Council. They are not only worried about losing their proper control over the area's inevitable growth, they are rightly upset that property tax increments — the increases in taxes paid by shiny new factories and warehouses over the revenue generated by bare ground — could be claimed by the authority for its own uses and designs.

This measure might make some sense if the land involved straddled the borders of several jurisdictions, a situation that might make comprehensive planning much more difficult. Or even if the city was controlled by a bunch of no-growthers who were determined to preserve the whole 38 square miles mostly west of Salt Lake City International Airport as a bird refuge.

But the city — which, by the way, has managed to launch a major refurbishment of the airport without the state's help or interference — is fully on board with the idea of the area's likely development. It is primed to become a hub of businesses that will pay premiums to have access to the airport, two Interstate highways, existing rail service and a city with a major research university, top-flight medical facilities and a lot of cool things to do.

A city that has not given anyone any reason to think it is not up to the job of planning and serving the area's growth. A city that might, though, be a bit more concerned than some about quality growth, environmental protections, sustainable building codes and such.

Or maybe the Legislature is just in a mood to do anything it can to take power away from a city led by a lesbian non-LDS Democrat. Nah, that can't be it.

Whatever the reason for this state usurpation of the city's lawful authority, it's not a good one.

This bill should be vetoed.
