

## Bill to disband Vernon gets support of Assembly panel

The Local Government Committee votes unanimously on legislation sponsored by Assembly Speaker John Pérez that would disincorporate the industrial city and make it part of L.A. County. A coalition of opponents say the bill would cost jobs.

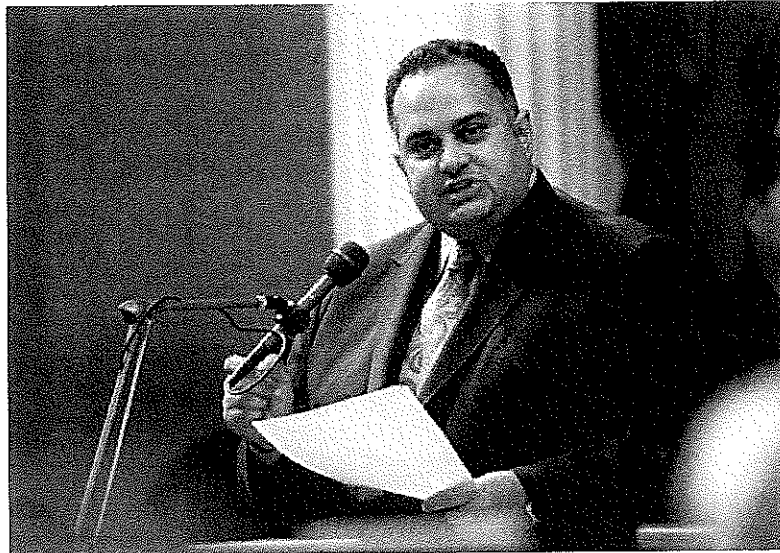


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Assembly Speaker John Pérez. (Rich Pedroncelli / Associated Press / October 7, 2010)

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By Sam Allen, Los Angeles Times  
April 14, 2011

**Reporting From Sacramento—** The state Legislature moved a step closer Wednesday to disbanding the city of Vernon, as an Assembly committee unanimously supported legislation that would disincorporate the industrial city and make it part of Los Angeles County.

The bill's author, Assembly Speaker John Pérez (D-Los Angeles), urged support for dissolving Vernon's municipal government, calling it "a city whose corruption is the worst we've seen in the state." He said the city, which has fewer than 100 residents but has 1,800 businesses, has for decades been controlled by a small group of people who have run it as a personal fiefdom.

The seven legislators on the assembly's Local Government Committee sided strongly with Pérez despite arguments from a coalition of Vernon business owners, workers and labor leaders who have been fighting AB 46 since it was introduced in December.

Dozens of members of the coalition voiced their opposition at the packed hearing, saying that the bill would cause job losses. Without the advantages that Vernon provides — low tax and utility rates among them — many business owners said they would be forced to leave the state.

"This is real," said Matt Wenzel, director of operations at a uniform company in Vernon. "If this bill passes, I am going to have to lay people off."

During the hearing, Pérez recounted scandals in Vernon dating to the 1940s. He also argued that the few voters who live in Vernon are scared to disagree with elected leaders because they are employed by the city, or because they depend on low rents in city-owned housing.

Pérez added that he would address the criticism the bill had received and find ways to maintain the city's "business-friendly" environment.

But Vernon business owners remain skeptical. They held a "job expo" outside the Capitol building before the hearing, where they served free lunches from Vernon firms, including Farmer John hot dogs and Gavina Gourmet Coffee.

"It's hard to imagine that things will be the same," said Juliet Oehler Goff, president of a manufacturing company. "I don't know how Pérez can duplicate all the things that Vernon offers."

Gene Erbin, an attorney representing Vernon, testified on the city's behalf, saying the bill was unconstitutional. He was joined by Barry Broad, a representative from the Teamster's union, and Peter Corselli, a manager of a Vernon cold-storage company.

But the legislators on the committee stood strongly behind Pérez. "Enough is enough," said Assemblyman Luis Alejo (D-Watsonville). "The day of reckoning for Vernon is today."

The bill now moves to the Assembly floor; it could become law as soon as September.

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