

Stop ridiculous debate over state rock

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GLORIA ROMERO'S timing couldn't be any worse. The Democrat state senator from Los Angeles has stirred a hornet's nest in Sacramento over, of all things, the official state rock of California. Yes, the state rock.

Forget fashioning a plan to pass the state budget. So what if more than 12 percent of the state's workforce remains unemployed. And with just a few weeks to the opening bell, schools systems still don't know how much funding they will get.

No, forget that, let's get to the important stuff. You know, like the state rock. It has become a hot-button topic of late among California lawmakers, geologists and bloggers.

For those not in the know, an olive green rock called serpentine was selected as the state rock in 1965. Romero sponsored a bill that will remove that designation from serpentine because natural-occurring asbestos can be found in it.

To borrow a phrase from erstwhile tennis great John McEnroe, "you cannot be serious!"

But, then again, why should we expect anything else from dysfunction junction?

Romero said that eliminating serpentine as the state rock would be symbolic to recognize those who have died or are suffering from cancers associated with asbestos.

Symbolism? Now? Really?

Besides, geologists as well as the Environmental Protection Agency say natural-occurring asbestos that remains undisturbed in the ground presents no risk. So what are we accomplishing here? The way we see it, wasting time and taxpayer money.

Apparently, Romero and her Senate colleagues who passed the bill have forgotten there are more urgent needs that our state lawmakers must tackle.

Instead, this seems to be an effort to pick low-hanging fruit to score a few political points. If this is the kind of fruit produced from a highly paid, full-time Legislature, maybe it is time to prune the tree.

More than 2.2 million people are unemployed as of June; teachers have no idea how many students they will have to teach, if their schools will be open by the end of the school year, or what supplies they can use; California still has the second-highest foreclosure rate in the country; businesses are still struggling mightily or are forced to close while some have left the state. That's just for starters.

The state is in dire straits and we are wasting time over a rock that experts say is harmless unless you beat it with a sledgehammer and take rapid, deep breaths. (Please don't try this at home, kids).

We understand this is symbolic and many people have suffered from asbestos poisoning. We do not mean to diminish their pain. But such victims do not need symbolic gestures, they need tangible laws and court decisions to reasonably protect the public.

There is a place for symbolic gestures, but they are all about proper timing and, frankly, Sen. Romero's timing stinks. She and her colleagues should put down the rock and get some real business done.