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California lawmakers propose rules, tax breaks for drone aircraft

By Patrick McGreevy

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Anticipating the day when drones will be a routine sight in California skies, lawmakers have proposed tax breaks to encourage companies to build the unmanned aircraft in this state and restrictions to protect the public from invasions of privacy.

The Federal Aviation Administration is working on guidelines to allow the widespread flying of small drones in U.S. airspace starting in 2015, anticipating that law enforcement agencies and others may have 10,000 of the aircraft flying five years later, The Times reported recently.

Assemblymen Jeff Gorell (R-Camarillo) and Steven Bradford (D-Gardena) said Wednesday that they have jointly authored two bills to prepare California for the new use of the technology.

AB 1326 would provide tax exemptions for construction of new manufacturing plants and for the purchase of machinery used to manufacture the airframes and avionics of unmanned aerial vehicles. Leading drone makers include AeroVironment Inc., a Monrovia company.

“The defense industry has been a huge incubator of jobs in California, especially Southern California,” Bradford said. “We want these well-paying, high-tech manufacturing jobs to continue to grow here in California.”

AB 1327 would require law enforcement agencies to adopt and publish rules to prevent unwarranted intrusion into the lives of people and creates penalties if private entities use drones for the surveillance of people without their consent.

State Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Pacoima) has separately introduced SB 15, a bill proposing that the state draft rules to prevent the use of drones to infringe on privacy rights. “I am concerned because domestic drones have the potential to be used for surreptitious surveillance activities that infringe upon fundamental constitutional rights,” Padilla said. “We must ensure that there are clear guidelines in place that protect the rights of all Californians.”

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