



Save yes vote for primary change

The Gresham Outlook, Sep 27, 2008

With a single exception, we don't believe the initiatives appearing on the November ballot will produce net benefits for Oregon.

On Wednesday, we gave our views on Ballot Measures 58, 59 and 60. Today, we examine the other five citizen initiatives that qualified for the November ballot. And next week, we will look at four measures referred to the ballot by the Oregon Legislature.

Here are our recommendations regarding Ballot Measures 61 through 65:

Measure 61 – Mandatory prison sentences:

We agree with the intent of this measure, which is to ensure that repeat drug and property-crime offenders are removed from the streets. Here at The Outlook, we've written stories about convicted identity thieves who victimize citizens over and over again – damaging or destroying lives in the process – but who never get locked away for any substantial period of time.

So we would be inclined to support this initiative, sponsored by Kevin Mannix, if it weren't for the cost. Because of the increased number of people who would be incarcerated under this measure, the state would have to build new prisons and spend an estimated \$586 million every two years on additional operating costs for prisons.

A better alternative is being offered by the Legislature in the form of Measure 57. It also increases sentences for these types of crimes, but does so in a way that Oregon can afford. We recommend voters choose Measure 57 over Measure 61.

Measure 62 – Lottery money for public safety:

Currently, state lottery money is allocated to education and to programs that encourage job creation in Oregon. Measure 62 would shift 15 percent of lottery revenues away from those priorities and toward public-safety programs. Since the lottery isn't likely to see the growth in the future that it has in the past, such a change could cost schools \$185 million per biennium.

With the economy slowing, money available for schools is likely to be limited in the next biennium anyway. For that reason, we recommend against diverting these dollars from education.

Measure 63 – building permit exemption:

If you've ever been frustrated by having to obtain a building permit to remodel your bathroom, you may be tempted by this measure, which eliminates the requirement for such permits on residential or farm projects costing less than \$35,000.

However, as irritating as building permits sometimes can be, there is a good reason to mandate them: It's called safety.

If a permit is required, then a homeowner is assured that the work will be done according to code. That's an important protection to retain in the law. We believe Oregon's homes will be safer if this measure, sponsored by Bill Sizemore, is rejected.

Measure 64 – no public money for politics:

This measure is highly confusing to read. But if you understand the background, it's simple to understand.

Every two years, Bill Sizemore sponsors a bunch of ballot measures that threaten public employees, and every two years the public-employee unions fight those measures using funding collected – in part – through the payroll-deduction process for union dues.

Sizemore's Measure 64 is his latest attempt to cut off funding to his opposition by prohibiting public resources to be used for political purposes. The measure also could have negative collateral effects on certain charitable organizations.

We recommend a "no" vote because we believe passage of this measure would silence public employee voices and tip the electoral scale too far in the direction of their constant critics.

Measure 65 – open primary:

This highly commendable measure would modernize Oregon's election system by allowing all voters – regardless of political party affiliation – to participate in primary elections and vote for whichever candidate they prefer – again, regardless of party.

The most partisan of politicians on the right and left oppose this measure because they fear the moderating effect it will have on the electorate and on the candidates. They also fear they will lose control of the nominating process.

Voters in Washington state have proven that once the power of an open primary is placed into voters' hands, they will not give it up. Oregon voters should try this system for themselves. Once they have experienced an open primary, they will never return to the ways of the past.