

# Bill Sizemore's latest measure again takes on Oregon-employee unions

by Dave Hogan

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When Oregon voters see their Nov. 4 ballot, Measure 64 will look familiar.

This will be the third vote in 10 years on Bill Sizemore's proposal to prohibit the use of public resources for political purposes.

It is the latest skirmish of a bigger war Sizemore has waged against public employee unions. The two sides have battled over initiatives, public pensions and taxes for more than a decade, either in court or on the ballot.

Just like before, this year's measure would block public employee unions from gathering their political money through payroll deductions.

### Measure 64

- The measure would prohibit any "public resource" from being used to collect or help collect money used for a political purpose, "except for resources used or spent preparing, printing or distributing an official voters pamphlet or conducting an election."
- Supporters and opponents agree it would block governments from collecting political funds for unions via payroll deductions. The two sides disagree whether it would also block government collection of donations to charitable organizations through payroll deductions.

But those unions and other opponents say they take little comfort in the fact that Oregonians rejected the proposals in 1998 and 2000.

"There's truly too much to lose for us to rely on the memory of voters," said Graham Trainor, campaign manager for the No on 64 effort.

Sizemore's hopes are boosted by the fact that two previous votes were close, particularly in 1998. That year, Oregonians rejected the proposal by only 22,000 votes out of 1.1 million votes cast.

"The principle is: Government should always be neutral in elections," he says. "They should not take a side or help either side. And currently, they're collecting millions of dollars for one side of the political debate."

Despite Sizemore's efforts, public employee unions such as the Oregon Education Association, which represents teachers, and Service Employees International Union, which represents many state workers, continue to flex some of the state's biggest political muscle -- and money. They continue to be among the biggest contributors to candidates and measure campaigns each election.

This year is no different. Those unions are the main financial support behind the Defend Oregon coalition that is opposing Measure 64 and four other Sizemore measures on this year's ballot. The OEA contributed \$2 million to the coalition campaign Aug. 8.

There's no sign of a truce on the horizon. Sizemore already has other anti-union initiatives filed for the 2010 election.

Sizemore says Measure 64 wouldn't stop union dues from being collected. Governments deduct union dues from workers' paychecks and forward that money to the respective unions. But the money Sizemore wants to stop is the additional amount deducted for unions political action committees.

Government workers can fill out a form to opt out of having the political contributions deducted from their paychecks, said Scott Moore, a Defend Oregon spokesman. The political amounts are returned to the workers monthly, Moore said.

Opponents argue that the measure is too broadly worded and would restrict charitable fundraising.

Sizemore said charities told him about that concern, and he added a provision to the measure that states: "Money spent lobbying an elected official shall not be considered used for a political purpose."

He said that was designed to keep the measure from blocking fund drives by United Way and other charities.

But United Way and other charitable organizations, such as the Oregon Humane Society, oppose the measure because they believe it would curb their ability to raise money through payroll deductions from government employees.

"Passage of Measure 64 definitely would harm Oregon Food Bank and I'm sure many other charitable organizations," said Jon Stubenvoll, the food bank's director of advocacy.

He said the charity is involved in political advocacy in Salem, and it believes the measure's prohibitions would apply to instances such as the annual food drive that state employees hold to benefit the agency.

"Last year, that drive brought in 750,000 pounds of food for the Oregon Food Bank network," Stubenvoll said, "and it brought in about \$350,000."

Stubenvoll noted that Oregon Food Bank was added this year to the charitable tax checkoff program where Oregon taxpayers can direct that part of their tax refund go to a charity, but Measure 64 also could block that, too. "Now we're concerned that would be gone as well," Stubenvoll said.

"The language in the measure is so broad that it's unclear how far it would go in banning payroll deductions for public employees," Moore said.

Sizemore said he's seen the No on 64 campaign's new statewide TV ad, which emphasizes that the measure would restrict the activities of public employees such as teachers, firefighters and nurses.

"We may not have a single television ad and they will have hundreds and hundreds of them," he said, "and yet they're claiming this will make them second-class citizens."