

Three initiatives just warmed-up leftovers

Published: August 23, 2008

Yamhill Valley News-Register

We don't want to seem like we're picking on Bill Sizemore. On second thought, yes, we do - he's such an easy target. His philosophy seems to be: If at first a ballot measure doesn't succeed, try, try again. Bring on the paid petitioners - again; call Loren Parks and other out-of-staters for donations - again; all the while making a mockery of the initiative system.

We say No to three of Sizemore's measures on the November ballot - 59, 60 and 64 - all repeats of sorts.

This is the third go-around for Ballot Measure 59, which would make federal income taxes fully deductible on state income tax returns. Currently, the deduction is limited to \$3,000.

In 2000, Sizemore proposed Ballot Measure 91 with the same intent, although that was proposed as a Constitutional amendment, while this year's measure is statutory.

Ballot Measure 41, floated in 2006, differed slightly. First of all, it was sponsored by Russ Walker's organization, Taxpayers Association of Oregon. But Walker is a buddy of Sizemore's and, in fact, co-sponsors three of this year's ballot measures with him. Measure 41 also would have restricted the amount of money the state government could raise through income tax by allowing that unlimited deduction for federal income tax.

Ballot measures such as these have one goal: to reduce the amount of Oregon income taxes paid by its citizens. It's easy to sympathize with that general goal, but if Measure 59 passes without replacement of that lost revenue, critical services will have to be curtailed. In economic downturns such as the one we are experiencing now, tax receipts will decline. And that newly created rainy day fund of \$237 million? Gone in a flash. According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy, as much as \$2 billion would be needed to weather a recession like the one we experienced in 2001.

Passage of Ballot Measure 60 would enact a merit-pay system for public school teachers based on classroom performance rather than length of time on the job.

On its surface, this seems logical. Other than cost-of-living increases, shouldn't raises reflect performance efficiencies and improvements? Nobody wants to see a bad teacher in the classroom, but most are weeded out in time. The problem is, there is no clear method of measuring classroom performance because all students - even if doing their best at all times - perform at different levels.

Back in 2000, Becky Miller, who happened to be employed by Bill Sizemore's Oregon Taxpayers United at the time, introduced Measure 95 as a Constitutional amendment. It, too, required school districts to base teachers' pay on job performance.

No dice, said the voters.

The final Sizemore rerun, Measure 64, bars public employee unions from using member dues to fund campaign contributions, lobbying efforts and other political activity.

It's a semi-clone of Sizemore's 2000 Ballot Measure 98, a Constitutional amendment that would have prohibited anyone from using public resources, even if reimbursed, to collect or help collect political funds. Again, though seemingly sensible on its surface, in practice, both these measures prohibit political free speech by public employees. Oregon public employee ethics laws already prohibit political campaigning while on the job.

As far as we can tell, the warmed-up leftovers from Sizemore and Walker are no tastier this year than before. About all these measures do is keep those professional initiative petitioners employed.