

Sizemore takes on unions for fourth time with M64

By James Sinks / *The Bulletin*

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SALEM — A bruising political battle over the clout of public employee unions will be reprised this fall, for the fourth time.

Measure 64 on the Nov. 4 ballot would prohibit government entities from collecting any dollars to be used for political purposes — with the chief goal of preventing public employee unions from getting unions dues via voluntary payroll deductions.

The measure is largely the same as three previous proposals, in 1998 and 2000, from prolific initiative author and anti-tax activist Bill Sizemore, of Klamath Falls, who also wrote Measure 64.

Public workers and their labor unions won those first three rounds, although narrowly, but spent millions in the process.

To Sizemore, it's an unfair advantage for unions to have government involved in the collection of political dues, even if it's simply to send a portion of employee paychecks to a designated organization.

“A basic principle of democracy is that government is a neutral arbiter of elections,” he said. “But in Oregon the government decides the outcome by collecting millions for the benefit of one side of the debate, and it skews the outcome.”

But to union leaders, the ballot measure represents the latest effort to gut the clout of working people — but also could have other consequences, such as making it harder for groups like the Humane Society to raise money through the “charitable checkoff” on Oregon tax returns.

Tom Chamberlain, director of the Oregon AFL-CIO, said he's confident that voters will reject the idea because



they've "seen through it three times."

He said similar measures have been overturned in Utah and Idaho as unconstitutional because they limit freedom of speech because it becomes harder for government workers to donate their money.

"What you have in this state is balance," he said. "There is a corporate agenda, a far right agenda like Sizemore is pushing, but he gets pushback from organizations representing the poor and working folks," he said.

"But if you take unions out and take out charitable organizations and nonprofits, there is not even a speed bump that will stop Bill Sizemore's agenda for Oregon."

It's illegal today to use public resources for political activity — including money, public employee time on the job, public building space or supplies.

However, government can and does facilitate voluntary payroll deductions from employees' paychecks for a variety of purposes, including retirement savings, charitable donations and union dues.

And labor unions in particular use much of their members' dues for political purposes, and that has long been a burr in the saddle for Republicans — because unions are by far the biggest financial backers of Democratic candidates and causes.

Under a Supreme Court decision, union workers are able to disallow their personal dues to be used for political purposes, if they choose.

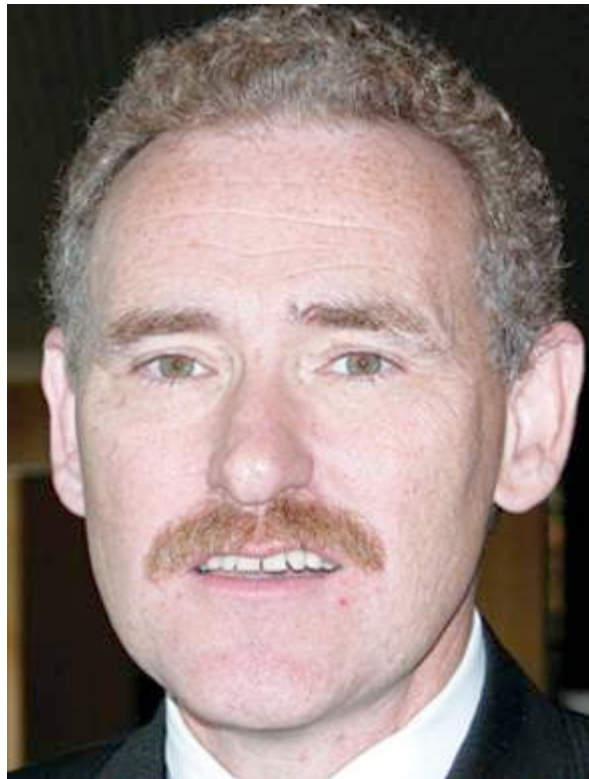
Measure 64 would prohibit any use of public resources to facilitate the collection and transfer of salary money — even through voluntary payroll deductions — that could be used to advance or oppose candidates or initiatives.

Under the measure, an organization or business entity would face civil penalties if it uses money from payroll deductions for a political purpose. The fine would be twice the amount of that money spent toward a prohibited political cause.

In addition, government employers would be barred from facilitating any transfers of money to that entity or union.



Bill Sizemore, anti-tax activist and author of Measure 64



The measure would not prevent public employees from independently donating to political causes.

But many workers presumably would elect to not donate money, if given the option to keep it.

Sizemore said unions don't represent the public — they represent unions, and have done so successfully in Oregon to the point that union-endorsed Democrats are in control through the entire state government.

"They dominate politics because they have an unfair advantage," he said. "It's undemocratic."

He said if unions were sure that all their members would continue to donate for political purposes, just regular citizens do, they would have nothing to fear.

Bill Lunch, a political scientist at Oregon State University in Corvallis, said the goal of Measure 64 — and its predecessors — is to tip the balance of power in Oregon.

"If Sizemore and his buddies can get those organizations out of the way by eliminating their capacity to finance campaigns against the measures that Sizemore and company put on the ballot, then those folks would have an open field in front of them," Lunch said.

"The unions recognize that, so we will see a major league drive to defeat it."

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Tom Chamberlain, director of Oregon AFL-CIO

Measure 64

Penalizes person, entity for using funds collected with "public resource" for "political purpose."

Chief petitioner: Bill Sizemore

Fiscal impact: Could require some additional spending by government entities, but it would be less than \$100,000.

PRO: It would reduce the money spent on political campaigns if voters limit the political resources of labor unions; union members could still independently donate to political causes they support — or to none at all. Bill Sizemore, 541-892-8050.

CON: Would erode the ability of public workers to pool money for political causes, and limit ability of some groups to fundraise in public buildings or to collect donations via the "charitable checkoff" on Oregon returns. Public workers can already opt out of political-related union dues. Defend Oregon Coalition, www.defendoregon.org.

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