

PETE RATES THE PROPOSITIONS

by Pete Stahl

PROPOSITION ONE -- for

California has traditionally funded its parks through the sale of bonds. Bond proposals such as Prop 1 were passed by the voters in 1964, 70, 74 and 76. The funds from these earlier measures are expected to run out by the end of the current fiscal year. Prop 1 is needed to continue the acquisition and maintenance of our parks.

The \$285 million worth of bonds, plus interest, spread out over 20 years, comes to \$25 million a year; a drop in the bucket if you look at our state budget. \$105 million of the \$285 million is earmarked for local agencies in order to develop city and county parks. These agencies desperately need the money; their budgets are already hurting from 13, and park funding is likely to be among the first victims of local budget slashing.

Opponents of Prop 1 like to point out its resemblance to the Prop 1 that was on your June ballot. These resemblances are misleading. The June proposal was a multi-purpose pork-barrel of park bonds, wildlife development, fisheries, and miscellany. The November Prop 1 deals exclusively with recreational parklands. There is no question that we need more urban parks, more campsites, and more parks close to cities. Our population is growing too rapidly for us to be satisfied with the status quo.

PROPOSITION TWO -- against

Recently, several state, regional and local agencies came to realize that the environmental quality of Lake Tahoe was going to hell. The millions of visitors to the area each year were leaving millions of beer cans, lots of auto exhaust, and plenty of sewage. The latter, being pumped into the lake, was beginning to affect Tahoe's water quality. So these agencies did what you or I would have done: they restricted further development of the Lake Tahoe area without adequate sewage facilities.

The speculators who held land around the lake cried foul (as well they might): now they would no longer be allowed to build their ski chalets, grocery stores and bowling alleys without first building a waste treatment plant. Of 15,000 lots now lying vacant, some 5,000 cannot be developed without the plant.

It was no longer profitable for the speculators to develop their property; but they couldn't very well liquidate it either, for that would mean taking it on the chin. So they looked for a way out. That way out is Prop 2. If Prop 2 is passed, Californians will spend \$85 million to take this devalued property off the speculators' hands.

Next, the speculators banded together under the name "League to Save Lake Tahoe", and advanced the flimsy notion that unless the state buys all their land right away, Lake Tahoe will turn into Lake Erie West. Under the pretense of environmentalism, these people want us to shell out \$85 million for property that not even we can use. If private interests cannot build on this land, do you think the public will be allowed access to it?

Tough cookies, guys! I might feel sorry if you lived in a ghetto somewhere, but lakefront parcel owners get no sympathy from me. That land should be yours to enjoy until you can scrape together the money for a sewage facility. Then you can build your resorts. Those who invest in the real estate market always incur some risk. It should not be up to the public to bail them out when they lose.

PROPOSITION THREE -- no

At issue here is whether insurance companies should be allowed to deduct their payments to the Insurance Guarantee Association (the insurance company that insures insurance companies against default) from their state Premium Taxes. Any claims (excuse the expression) you've heard that Prop 3 will provide more insurance against insurance company defaults are simply so much hogwash. The Legislature's powers to insure insurance companies will not be affected by Prop 3.

So, you ask, why shouldn't the insurance companies be allowed to deduct their IGA payments from their tax payments? Well, the answer is simple: here is a case where it is desirable to have costs passed on to the consumer. Consider that any tax break we give the insurance companies will ultimately become an additional burden on the taxpayers; on the other hand, if the insurance companies have to pay the tax, then those who will ultimately bear the burden are the policy-holders. It makes much more sense for the policy-holders, who would benefit from the IGA, to fund it in proportion to their potential risk, than for you and me to pitch in to the fund every time we pay sales tax. A no vote on Prop 3 will preserve the current, equitable situation.

PROPOSITION FOUR -- yes

Say you live in Santa Banta. Now Santa Banta has grown an awful lot recently, and the time has come for Santa Banta to build another elementary school. Everybody admits it; everybody thinks it's a good idea; everybody's willing to pay for the new school.

Much to your collective chagrin, the Santa Banta City Council says that, because of Proposition 13, it cannot issue the bonds required to finance the new school; in fact, it will have to close the Santa Banta Library in order to build the new school.

But wait--there on the horizon--riding a white horse--galloping to the rescue-- it's PROP 4!! With one swift stroke, Prop 4 allows the Santa Banta City Council to issue its bonds, keep the library open, and build the new school. Sure, your property taxes go up, but only enough to pay off the school bonds. And here's the kicker--Santa Banta can only issue bonds (and raise property taxes) with the approval of two-thirds of Santa Banta's voters. So you're safe from having your taxes go up willy-nilly, safe from having to finance the mayor's brother-in-law's car wash, and safe to vote down any municipal bond-requiring project you don't want to pay for. What a godsend.

PROPOSITION FIVE -- yes

Exempts disaster victims and people who earthquake-proof their buildings from being reassessed. Prevents them from having to pay higher property taxes as a result of their misfortune or common sense.

PROPOSITION SIX -- yes

With deep misgivings. Prop 6 allows the Legislature to reduce the number of jurors in civil trials in local courts from twelve to eight. Criminal cases, felony trials, and trials in higher courts would not be affected.

I am ambivalent on Prop 6. In civil trials, certainly eight people can decide as well as twelve. If someone feels he's getting a raw deal, he can appeal to a higher court where he'll find all twelve seats occupied. But Prop 6 constitutes a dangerous precedent that could foreshadow a serious undermining of our Seventh Amendment rights. Vote for Prop 6, but keep in mind that we will have to watch it in the future.

PROPOSITION SEVEN -- yes

Exempts people who install solar energy systems from being reassessed. Prevents them from having to pay higher property taxes as a result of their incredible foresight and patriotism.

PROPOSITION EIGHT -- yes

Prop 8 deals with the celebrated Peripheral Canal and all its myriad ramifications. Boy, is it complicated--five pages of fine print in March Fong's Poop Sheet. But it seems to represent the very best of all possible alternatives. Here's the lowdown:

- 1) No major alterations may take place regarding the Peripheral Canal, Delta wildlife conservation programs, or Delta water rights without the approval of two-thirds of the voters.
- 2) No "Wild and Scenic Rivers" may be exploited for their water without two-thirds voter approval.
- 3) The Delta's ecology will be preserved. No flow reversals (and accompanying higher salinity levels) will be permitted.
- 4) Fresh water to the Delta area will be guaranteed.

The only people who are complaining about Prop 8 are the corporate farmers, who would now have to go through all sorts of red tape before they could dam up another river to over-irrigate their rutabagas. Everybody else, liberal and conservative, supports Prop 8. You should too.

PROPOSITION NINE -- yes

Permits the state to increase grants to water districts, school districts and cities which are unable to provide safe drinking water from \$15 million to \$30 million. A small price to pay.

PROPOSITION TEN -- yes

The people who are pushing no-smoking sections are certainly going about it in the right way. First, they presented us with a radical, divisive and expensive proposal, Prop 5 on your June ballot. Now comes a toned-down version of the same thing. If Prop 10 fails

(who am I kidding?--when Prop 10 fails), one would expect an even more watered-down version to appear on the next statewide ballot. The idea is to get the voters to accept the strongest measure possible, while at the same time weakening their opposition to controls on smoking by making each successive proposal less distasteful than the last. "I hate the idea of smoking controls, but this proposition isn't nearly so bad as the last one," is what Prop 10-pushers want John Q. Public to say.

Personally, I think cigarettes should be made illegal as addictive drugs. But if you simply want the option of working in a smoke-free environment, or of not having to inhale the cigar fumes from the man at the next table at your favorite restaurant, then vote for Prop 10.

PROPOSITION ELEVEN -- yes

Judges whose terms of office began before 1977 get annual raises based on the cost-of-living index; judges whose terms began in 1977 or later get a maximum 5% annual pay increase. As a result, in 1986, two of the seven State Supreme Court justices will be earning \$157,000, while their five colleagues will be eeking out a mere \$98,000. Similar inequities exist throughout California's justice system. Prop 11 brings the salaries of all judges of equal stature to the same level: the lower, post-1977 rate. This "low" salary level is still high enough to preserve judicial integrity, if the Supreme Court salaries are any indication. There is certainly no harm in voting for Prop 11.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

PROPOSITION A -- no

County-wide primary elections are held in September of odd-numbered years. The primary is used to narrow the fields of supervisorial candidates down to two per district, who face each other in the November election. If there are only two candidates to begin with, they run against each other only during the November election. Prop A would move such contests to the September primary. All other factors being equal (which they are), the only important statistic here is that more people tend to vote in November than in September. On that basis alone, I urge a no vote on A.

PROPOSITION B -- no

Prop B seeks to reinstate the political spoils system. Granted, our present Civil Service Commission is somewhat unwieldy and outmoded, but it's still better than what is proposed here. At present, the Civil Service is more or less independent of the Board of Supervisors. It hires, fires, makes promotions, and sets salaries. Under Prop B, the independent Civil Service will have all of these functions stripped from it. The only authority it will retain will be that of the "protector of the merit system"; in other words, the Civil Service will be effectively abolished.

In its place, Prop B institutes a county personnel system run by a Chief Administrative Officer. Since the CAO, or any of his/her top assistants, would be hired and fired by a three-of-five

majority of the Board of Supervisors (instead of the 4/5 currently required to unseat a Commissioner), the CAO would be little other than a crony of the three supervisors who appointed him/her. These same three supervisors would have the power to set all salaries, establish rules for employer-employee relations, and negotiate all labor relations matters.

You see, Prop B puts the entire county bureaucracy into the hands of three politicians. The temptation for these people to use this authority to enhance their own status is not only frightening; it's downright dangerous. If you don't think our supervisors are petty, nasty and power-hungry, you've obviously never been to a meeting of the Board. I do not want to see these people gain control of the Civil Service, where politics has absolutely no place. Unless you think that who your water-meter-reader is should depend on the outcome of the last election, vote no on B.

PROPOSITION C -- no

The concept of workfare is that the state shouldn't give people a free lunch without giving them a sermon, too. By requiring welfare recipients to work, the argument goes, the state can reduce the number of people on the welfare rolls, while at the same time getting some useful work out of the unemployed. Workfarers will have no incentive to be lazy and stay unemployed, since they'll have to work to get their welfare checks.

These arguments miss the point completely. Workfare penalizes welfare recipients for being victims of a free-market economy. Workfare penalizes government employees by giving their work to unqualified welfare recipients. Workfare penalizes the taxpayers by requiring more money to administer than it's worth. So even though it's non-binding, vote no on C.

CITY OF SAN DIEGO

PROPOSITION L -- no

PROPOSITION N -- yes

L and N deal with firefighters' salaries. Prop N sets firefighters' pay equal to the average of the salaries of firefighters in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Long Beach, San José and Oakland. Prop L, on the other hand, makes any scheme of this type illegal for any class of municipal employees. The City Council, as you might guess, is backing L.

The important facts are (1) that San Diego firefighters are paid 16% less than the average for the five cities mentioned above; (2) that it is illegal for San Diego's firefighters to strike; (3) that binding arbitration is not legal in determining firefighters' salaries. These facts tip the current bargaining situation heavily in favor of the City. Anything the voters do to strengthen the firefighters' position will only be in the interest of fairness. Voting no on L and yes on N will not only promote equity at the bargaining table; it just might prevent the sort of thing that happened in Memphis earlier this year.

PROPOSITION M -- yes

Our mayor and city councilmen do not get paid enough. That may sound strange coming from a liberal like myself, but it's true. Until very recently, San Diego considered the City Council a part-time job; annual salary was \$5,000 only seven years ago. That has now risen to \$21,500, but it's still not enough.

There are two reasons for this. First, we must pay Council members enough to preserve their integrity, much the same as we pay judges to ensure integrity. San Diego is a big, big city, and the decisions our councilmen make affect millions and millions of dollars worth of property, services, etc. I don't want to suggest that there were under-the-table payments when Mayor Wilson gave away Torrey Pines Science Park to Signal Oil and Life Insurance of California, but clearly the potential for corruption is there.

Second, we must be able to attract qualified people to run our city. A board member of a corporation with a budget comparable to San Diego's wouldn't dream of running for City Council--he'd have to take a tremendous pay cut to do so. I'm not suggesting six-digit councilman's salaries, but some increase would benefit the city. Proposition M, by making salary evaluations more frequent, will tend to raise the salaries of the mayor and his council.

PROPOSITION O -- yes

Prop O does two things: it passes on to renters the property tax break landlords got when 13 passed, and it provides cheaper rentals for the entire city through rent controls. Prop 13 savings would be translated into tenant savings by rolling back all rents to their August, 1977, levels. The rent controls would be administered by eight five-member boards and one 17-member board.

Opponents of Prop O claim that the laws of supply and demand should be allowed to prevail in the rental market; we live within a free-enterprise system, after all. When you're dealing with such an essential commodity as housing, however, the laws of supply and demand will never hold. The supply of rental units is more or less inflexible, and the demand for rental units has nothing to do with the prices of the units. A landlord who tells you that his rents will go down when more apartment buildings are built of when fewer people need places to live is telling you he'll lower his prices when the sun rises in the west.

Even if the sun does start in the ocean some day, Prop O will be prepared. A provision of Prop O says that rent controls can be dropped if the vacancy rate rises above 5% in any district. I can't think of anything more reasonable. It's time the consumers got a little protection where they need it most.

CANDIDATES

Take your pick. I like Carter, Cranston, Above (None Ofthe) and Becker, but none of these contests will be close. Remember that a vote for Anderson hurts Carter and helps no one.