



PETE RATES THE PROPOSITIONS



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by Pete Stahl

PROPOSITION TWENTY-FIVE -- yes

When California wants to finance a large project, it asks the voters for permission to take out a loan. Props 25 through 30 are just such requests. If the voters approve, the legislature may take out loans for the projects by selling bonds, which are paid back with interest over 20 or 30 years. The bond payments tend to increase the state's expenditures just as any other project would (except for Prop 29--see below). So when we vote on a general obligation bond, we are really voting on whether the project in question ought to be added to the state's budget.

"Wait a minute!" I hear you cry. "What about those interest payments? It says here that, for most bonds, we end up paying more in interest than the original cost of the bond!" Yes that's true. It's also true when you take out a loan to buy a house, or a car, or anything else that you need immediately but can't pay for yet. Props 25 through 30 are pretty urgent matters. It's worth paying the premium of interest to get the funding now.

There is another, more important reason to vote for a bond measure. In addition to being formal requests for permission to take out "loans", bond measures are also looked upon as referenda on the merits of the proposed projects. If a bond measure fails, legislators are likely to believe that the public feels the project is not worthy of receiving any state funding. You may have meant, "yes on the project but no on the bonds," but your message to Sacramento will read, "no on the project." So if you vote down a bond measure just because you don't like bonds, you may well have killed forever the project the bonds were to have funded.

So now we turn to Prop 25. Prop 25 will provide \$325,000,000 to local agencies for sewage treatment, water reclamation and water conservation facilities. Of course the need for these facilities is great. Prop 25 will cost around \$33,400,000 annually through 2004, or less than \$1.50 per year for every person in California. When you look at it that way, it's a small price to pay.

PROPOSITION TWENTY-SIX -- yes

In 1978 Prop 13 effectively ended local school districts' ability to pay for construction and major rehabilitation of school buildings. The state now pays for this. Those of you with good memories will remember Prop 1 on the November 1982 ballot; it provided \$500,000,000 for school construction and rehabilitation. Well, that money's all been committed now, and there's a backlog of \$850,000,000 worth of requests for more. Prop 26 will provide \$450,000,000. It's only about half of what's needed, but Prop 26 is a positive step.

PROPOSITION TWENTY-SEVEN -- yes

Do you know anybody who's against cleaning up hazardous wastes? I sure don't. Currently California's toxic chemical cleanups are paid for by a tax on hazardous waste producers, federal "Superfund" grants, and "recovery fees" charged to those whose messes are cleaned up. Prop 27 claims it will pour a fresh \$100,000,000 into the California "Superfund" for removal of hazardous substances. Ah, but read the fine print: While the bond proceeds from Prop 27 are funding the cleanup efforts, the sources that are

currently paying for cleanup will instead be paying off the bond. If Prop 27 passes, toxic waste disposal will get its \$100,000,000 shot in the arm, but the money it would otherwise expect from hazardous-waste taxes, federal "Superfund" grants and recovery fees will instead go to bond and interest payments.

So why vote for Prop 27? Because its passage will allow the other provisions of Senate Bill 1465 to go into effect, and that will increase the amount of money available for hazardous substance cleanup. SB 1465 will raise the amount of hazardous-waste tax collected annually from \$10,000,000 to \$15,000,000. It will also facilitate collection of "recovery fees" charged to chemical dumpers, and it opens the door to extending the state "Superfund" program beyond 1991 (when it is currently scheduled to expire). SB 1465 will die if Prop 27 fails. It's too beneficial for us to allow that to happen.

PROPOSITION TWENTY-EIGHT -- yes

Safe drinking water is very important. If you disagree, I invite you to spend a week in Tijuana and then see how you feel. By and large our government has done an outstanding job of providing us with safe drinking water. But over 40 large and 400 small water suppliers are still unable to meet minimum bacteriological, chemical or other health standards for domestic water. It is estimated that the cost of upgrading these is over \$200,000,000. Prop 28 provides \$75,000,000 to help out.

PROPOSITION TWENTY-NINE -- yes

The Cal-Vet loan program has been around since 1921. It provides low-interest home and farm loans to veterans. Since day one, the Cal-Vet loan program has been entirely self-supporting. All of the costs of the program, including bureaucratic overhead, have been covered by the loan repayments from the participating veterans. Every few years, the program needs our permission to sell more bonds to raise some more money; hence Prop 29. I heartily recommend that you grant your permission, and allow the continuation of this smashing success.

PROPOSITION THIRTY -- yes

The number of Californians over age 60 has been growing at roughly twice the rate of the population as a whole. Senior centers are very useful to such people. Many centers provide recreation, meals, health services and a variety of other things; others are just a safe place to meet. At any level, senior centers can give a person just enough independence to stay out of a nursing home. Prop 30 lets California issue \$50,000,000 in bonds to build, lease or refurbish senior centers where there is a documented need. Prop 30 is not being contested as hotly as other issues on the ballot, and its results may not affect you for many, many years. But your vote in Prop 30's favor will help in some small way to reverse the American tradition of discarding people at age 60 or 65.

PROPOSITION THIRTY-ONE -- no

We are asked here whether a building ought to be reassessed (triggering higher property taxes) if the only thing done to it was the installation of fire sprinklers, smoke alarms, fire escapes, etc. Under our current system, reassessment would occur because the "new construction or improvements" to the structure have caused its real value to increase. One is tempted to say that, in this case, we still have essentially the same building--only now it's less likely to burn down. Why penalize the safety-conscious owner?

If you swallowed that argument, I have a nice bridge in New York I'd like to sell you. The kind of construction that will be affected by Prop 31 is really major stuff, like tearing out walls, adding "fire-escape" balconies and so on. Reassessment does not currently take place every time you stick a smoke-alarm on your ceiling. The modifications which Prop 31 would exempt will be fundamental changes in structures which will increase their real values. I see no reason to make a special exception here.

Well, actually I do see one reason: As time since Prop 13 goes on the discrepancy between real and assessed values of property becomes greater. The amount a building-owner's property taxes will jump for "new construction or improvements" increases every year. Prop 31's failure will increasingly prevent people who would otherwise remodel for fire safety from doing so, and thus tend to perpetuate the existence of fire-traps throughout the state. It's a valid point, but I don't think it's enough to outweigh the previous arguments, so I still recommend against Prop 31. [No, that's not deja vu. This is almost identical to November 1982's Prop 7.]

PROPOSITION THIRTY-TWO -- yes

48 states and the federal government allow their supreme courts to review all or part of a lower court's decision. California requires its Supreme Court to review every issue of every case it accepts. Prop 32 will bring California into line with the rest of the nation, and increase the efficiency of the Supreme Court.

PROPOSITION THIRTY-THREE -- yes

Prop 33 will allow blind and disabled people with incomes under \$24,000 and at least 20% equity in their homes to defer property tax payments until they pass away or sell their houses. In effect, California will lend these folks the money to pay their taxes; when the state is finally repaid, an interest charge will be levied on the total. It is possible that the state will lose some money if the accumulated taxes exceed a house's value. It is also possible that some blind and disabled people will become unable to sell their homes because they would have to pay off so many years' property taxes when they did so. But on the whole, Prop 33 is a kind and charitable act. It will allow many blind and disabled citizens to keep houses they might otherwise be forced to give up because of taxes.

PROPOSITION THIRTY-FOUR -- no

I'm sure you've heard by now of the horrible plight suffered by the owners of homes listed in the National Historic Register or located in Registered Historic Districts. You haven't? Okay, let me fill you in. Whenever these poor souls wish to restore their ancient abodes to the condition of their former grandeur, the cruel, heartless government calls it "reconstruction" and threatens to reassess the their cherished structures. The property taxes would go up just as much as they would if the next-door-neighbor remodeled his prefabricated, vintage-1975, ranch-style shack. One shudders at the very thought of it! Prop 34 seeks to spare the beleaguered owners of these venerable dwellings from the painful agony of reassessment if they only perform historically accurate reconstructions. Or install handicapped access (thought you'd slip that by us, didn't you?).

I can't say that I see any benefit from Prop 34 to anybody besides the owners of these creaky, old fireboxes. We're not talking museums here. To qualify, a building must be the principal residence of its owner. The public won't be guaranteed any opportunity to view the restored houses. And this handicapped provision--it makes no sense whatso-

ever. I think that, despite Assemblyman Farr's protestations to the contrary, Prop 34 is a magnificent example of property tax relief for the rich. Gotta love it.

PROPOSITION THIRTY-FIVE does not exist.

PROPOSITION THIRTY-SIX -- no

Prop 36 starts out by giving \$1,700,000,000 in refunds to people who have owned buildings since before March 1, 1977. All other property-owners can expect a property tax increase. Prop 36 continues by making it virtually impossible for a local government to increase any person's tax for any reason. Further, Prop 36 would make illegal the payment of a "benefit assessment" to a local agency in return for service or maintenance from the agency (like fire protection, paramedics, mosquito abatement, street maintenance). Next, Prop 36 allows any group of 14 state senators (one-third of the Senate) to block any state tax increase. And Prop 36 finishes by allowing property to be passed from generation to generation with no reassessment. This last feature galls me the most. Prop 36 will create a landed gentry in California, a set of people who pay virtually no property tax because they inherited their land. If you think there are some inequities in the property tax structure today, just imagine what it will be like in several generations. The mind boggles.

PROPOSITION THIRTY-SEVEN -- no

Dear Conservatives: Your economic theory holds that any money given to the government is money misused. Giving money to the government promotes economic stagnation, over-reliance on government programs, and general decay of the private sector. If the California Lottery (Prop 37) passes, 50 cents of every dollar used to buy a Lottery ticket will go--guess where? Conservative estimates (your kind of estimates) say that over \$500,000,000 a year from the Lottery will go to Big Sacramento. Hardly small change, and this mostly from working-class people who would otherwise inject these dollars into our vibrant state economy. The Lottery can only wreak havoc with the recovery in California.

Dear Liberals: Half of every dollar spent on the Lottery goes to the government. The Lottery is a tax. And it's about the most regressive tax you can imagine. Lottery tickets will be purchased almost exclusively by those least able to afford them: the down-and-out, the poor, just hoping against hope for an easy way out of their miserable poverty. When rich people want to gamble, they speculate in stocks, bonds and real estate (or they fly their Learjets to Monte Carlo); the odds are good and the payoffs handsome. When the poor want to gamble, they will buy Lottery tickets, where the odds are astronomical. The Lottery will become a false messiah to millions, promising to lead them to instant prosperity, never delivering, and demanding more money all the while.

Dear Everybody: Here is what life will be like if Prop 37 passes: Every time you look at a magazine, bus stop or billboard, you will see an ad for the Lottery. Every time you pick up a newspaper, you'll read about the latest winner. When you turn on your radio you'll hear the winning numbers announced regularly. When you turn on your TV you'll see the Big Lottery Jackpot Show. When you go to the super-market or the liquor store or the newsstand, you'll see big, bright displays where you can "play your number."

Believe me folks, the Lottery will be a big intrusion into your life, even if you never

once buy a ticket. There will be no escaping it, and no shutting it down once it starts. I've lived in New England with its multitudinous statewide games, and I've got to say that a lottery's strong presence really cheapens the quality of life. I'll let others tell you how the windfall for public education will be only temporary, or how organized crime will move in, etcetera. Prop 37's passage will lower, significantly and permanently, the quality of the life we enjoy in California. And that intangible quality is our most valuable asset.

PROPOSITION THIRTY-EIGHT -- no

I admire the principle upon which many of you base your support of Prop 38. The one thing that unifies all the myriad disparate elements in our country is a common language. Knowledge of English allows everybody full participation in our society; nothing else is required. Those who don't know English are effectively "prisoners" of the ghettos where their foreign languages are spoken: they can't venture outside their neighborhoods and hope to understand or be understood. Anything we do to discourage people from learning English only serves to perpetuate this de facto segregation of Chinese, Hispanics and others from the mainstream of society. It is up to us to do whatever we can to encourage immigrants and other foreign-language speakers to learn English. It's for their own good, and for the good of society as a whole. Prop 38 will require Governor Deukmejian to ask Congress to abolish the requirement for bilingual ballots. Bilingual ballots tell non-English-speakers, "It's okay for you not to know any English, you can still vote anyways." Do we want our government, of all things, to be saying this?

As I said, I admire the principle. In this case, however, it's misapplied. It may be true that the abolition of bilingual ballots will provide some small motivation for people to learn English. The side-effect of this abolition, however, is the virtual disenfranchisement of a large number of citizens who will no longer be able to understand their ballots. The miniscule impetus Prop 38 will give to a single-language society cannot possibly justify the effective expulsion of so many people from the polls.

PROPOSITION THIRTY-NINE -- no

Let's say that there is a large Martian community in your town, with a population of about 120% of the population of one Assembly district. You have just been given the task of drawing California's Assembly districts. How do you deal with the Martians? Do you make one district with 100% Martians and let the other 20% form a non-represented minority in a neighboring district? Do you split the Martians into two districts, each with a 60% Martian majority? Or do you split the Martians among three or more districts, giving them the majority in none and virtually no representation in the Assembly?

Now replace the word "Martian" in the preceding paragraph with "Democrat" or "Conservative" or "Jewish" or "Black" or "Farmer" or "Environmentalist". You quickly realize that the question of reapportionment is, at its barest essence, a political question. There is no way to draw the lines between districts without taking politics into account, one way or another. There is no such thing as "empirically fair," either. Wherever you draw the lines you will give extra representation to some, and not enough to others.

So what's all this talk about Martians got to do with Prop 39? Not a lot--I just wanted to point out the futility inherent in trying to come up with an solution to the problem of fair reapportionment. Prop 39 seeks to set up a commission of retired appellate justices who would draw our Assembly, State Senate and Congressional districts. These retired judges are supposed to be impartial, and thus be equally unfair to everybody when drawing up the lines. But there's a catch: the judges would be selected for the

commission based on the political party of the governor who elevated them to the appellate bench. This means that whenever a governor considers a judge for promotion to the appellate court, he's got to consider, somewhere in the back of his mind, that this judge could very well be "representing" his party on the reapportionment commission in the future. Suddenly the spectre of a party-loyalty test for judges looms, large and dark and awful. Let's keep politics out of the courts. Vote no on 39.

PROPOSITION FORTY -- no

Prop 40 would require you and me to fill out the following form whenever we made a contribution of any size to a candidate, political party or political action committee:

DECLARATION OF FREE WILL

This is my contribution in the amount of \$ _____ to the campaign of _____ who is a candidate for the elective office of _____ / _____ political party / _____ political action committee, and is to be used only for that purpose. This contribution is being made of my own free will, without coercion, and with my own funds. I have received nothing of value nor any promise of anything of value from any person in exchange for this contribution. I have not contributed an amount in excess of one thousand dollars (\$1,000) in this fiscal year to the candidate/party/committee named above. I am registered to vote at _____ / I am not registered to vote, my principal place of residence is _____. I sign this statement under penalty of perjury. (signed:) _____ (occupation:)

I am not making this up.

PROPOSITION FORTY-ONE -- no

Selfishness and greed have become fashionable once again. Prop 41 seeks to reduce drastically the amount of money given to public assistance programs in California. These programs are charity, pure and simple. The benefits go to poor children, the blind, the disabled, the elderly, the helpless. If you vote for Prop 41, you're asking these people to get along with less, while you get along with more. You're telling them that you think public assistance money in this state is misspent, and that you know how to spend it better. You're saying that you just don't care. You're selfish and greedy and inhuman, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Pete Stahl is a registered voter.