

Measure 56 takes aim at twisted election law

'Double majority' rule good for the 'no new taxes' crowd, but not for Oregon. Besides, it's not how democracy works.

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Wouldn't it be great if we never had to pay increased taxes again? We're all for that.

And how about those milk prices? And the increasing costs of Junior's soccer gear? And \$4 for a gallon of gas? In our ideal world, they'd all be free — or at least they'd never get more expensive.

And if we could make it so by sitting home and doing nothing, all the better.

That's not the way most things work, of course. But it's the way the no-new-taxes crowd has tweaked the election system to its advantage in Oregon. Because of the state's so-called "double majority" rule, you can sit home and ignore your ballot and squash new property taxes at the same time.

This law requires that in most elections, such money measures must be approved by a majority of voters — and voter turnout must reach at least 50 percent as well.

In our book, if you're registered to vote you should cast a ballot, but that's not the way it works. The reality is that in most elections, most people who are registered don't vote. Getting to 50 percent is a job.

Fans of the double majority know that, and they have used it well. In Jackson County, money proposals have failed in the years since it passed even though a majority of those who voted wanted them to pass.

The double majority has been a weird and harmful addition to Oregon law since it was first OK'd by voters a dozen years ago, but now a legislative rewrite aims to set the process right again.

The fix comes in Measure 56, a statewide measure on the Nov. 4 ballot that would drop the "double" requirement in May and November elections, the most common in Oregon, while maintaining it for votes taken at any other time (when tiny turnouts are most likely).

If Oregonians pass Measure 56, they'll likely face new property taxes, it's true. But that will continue to happen only when a majority of people who vote for a measure want it to pass.

That's how our government is supposed to work, with the majority calling the shots. The trouble with the double majority is that it puts people who don't participate in the driver's seat instead.

The Mail Tribune urges a "yes" vote on Measure 56 on the Nov. 4 ballot.