



Editorial

Ballot referrals warrant passage

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The four November ballot measures referred to voters by the Oregon Legislature range from the monumental – imprisoning drug dealers and repeat property-crime offenders – to the mundane.

But they all share one commonality: Voters should approve them all in the November general election.

In general, measures referred to voters by the Legislature deserve more credibility than those that arrive through the initiative process. The legislative measures are subjected to debate and analysis in Salem, and they must accommodate many points of view before they are sent to voters.

Initiatives, on the other hand, are usually the product of single-issue authors who don't fully take into account potential unintended consequences of their actions. In the past two weeks, we offered recommendations on the initiatives. Now, here is our breakdown of the legislative referrals appearing on the November ballot:

Measure 54 – Let 18-year-olds vote (again):

This measure cleans up the Oregon Constitution to make it consistent with federal law and also with current practices in Oregon. The state Constitution contains an archaic requirement that, in order to participate in a school election, a voter must be 21 years of age and have lived in the school district for six months.

This requirement isn't enforced, of course, because the federal voting age was dropped to 18 years of age nearly four decades ago.

While this measure has no practical effect other than to keep the state Constitution current, voters should approve it.

Measure 55 – Keep your legislator, for now:

This measure also is a technical change in the law. It will have some effect on legislative representation – but we think the overall result will be positive.

Every 10 years, the federal census counts the number of people in Oregon, and the 2010 census is fast approaching. Following that census, legislative boundaries must be redrawn to adjust to population changes.

However, in Oregon the timing of that process has meant that some legislators end up being reassigned to new districts in the middle of their terms of office. This measure would make it possible for those legislators to serve out their terms – the new boundaries would take effect in the next election.

This new system will cause less confusion for the Legislature and its constituents. It deserves approval.

Measure 56 – A new double-majority law:

This measure is generating heat as anti-tax activists claim the Legislature is trying to undo the will of the people.

The state's current double-majority law – originally established as part of a Bill Sizemore-sponsored initiative – states no property tax increase can be approved without both a majority vote and a majority voter turnout. The only exception is for November elections in even-number years.

We believe this law has given too much power to voters who choose not to participate: They can doom a tax proposal simply by not voting – and that seems undemocratic.

However, we do agree with those who argue that, before the double-majority requirement was implemented, local governments had a tendency to sneak tax measures past voters during extremely low-turnout elections – the ones held in March and September.

That's why we like this legislative compromise. Measure 56 doesn't repeal the double majority rule. It amends the law so that it doesn't apply in May and November of each year. This is similar to the current law, except it gives local governments four opportunities every two years to ask for a tax increase – instead of just one. This is especially helpful if a government is faced with an emergency situation, or if voters like the idea of being able to study tax measures one at a time, rather than being bombarded with numerous measures every two years in November.

Measure 57 – Law and order without bankruptcy:

This measure is the Legislature's answer to Kevin Mannix's crime-fighting Measure 61.

Measure 57 is superior to Mannix's in several respects: It reserves mandatory sentences on property crimes to those who commit repeat offenses. It places greater emphasis on treatment for drug offenders, thereby getting at the root of the problem. And it would cost the state at least \$1 billion less than Measure 61.

We believe both these measures address the frustration the public feels when it sees criminals, especially identity thieves, victimize people over and over again with impunity. Either measure would put those repeat criminals in jail, but Measure 57 accomplishes this in a more humane, measured and fiscally responsible manner.

Voters should say yes to Measure 57 and no to 61.

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