

Measure 56 makes each vote count

Community Soapbox

By Joan Smith

The Clackamas Review, Oct 7, 2008

Who should decide an election? People who vote, or those who don't bother? That's the question voters will decide when they vote on Measure 56.

Currently, under Oregon's "double majority" requirement, people who don't vote can count more than the people who cast their ballot.

What is the impact of this? As chair of the North Clackamas School Board, I can tell you first hand.

Back in March 1997, North Clackamas was the first Oregon school district to be hurt by the double majority law. Despite a nearly 58 percent majority yes vote on the North Clackamas school bond, the election was invalid because only 46 percent of voters bothered to participate.

Bottom line: our community's votes did not count. Not the yes votes, and not the no votes.

That summer, more than 300 volunteers wore out their shoes conducting a door-to-door survey of all 29,000 voters who failed to participate in the election. What we found was shocking.

Our survey effort revealed solid evidence that more than 6,000 of those registered non-voters were no longer eligible to vote in our community.

Many were dead. Some were registered twice. Some had moved out of Oregon. Some were imprisoned felons. Some had registered at fake addresses. Still, their failure to cast a ballot invalidated the 24,732 ballots that were cast.

While our effort did not result in the election being validated, it did result in a county effort to make our voter rolls more accurate.

Still, the "double majority" law remains on the books, giving more power to non-voters than to voters. How many voters in how many communities have had their votes cancelled since this law was enacted? Even one is too many.

It's time to fix a flawed law that gives more power to non-voters than to voters.

Vote YES on Measure 56 to restore democracy and basic fairness to local elections.

Joan Smith is chair of the North Clackamas School Board.