

## Time to get rid of the double majority?

Measure 56 would repeal the 1996 amendment, which requires a double majority for property tax measures

By [Jason Chaney](#)

October 9, 2008

### Central Oregonian

Sometimes a non-vote can be a "no" vote. This is the subject addressed by Ballot Measure 56 in the upcoming November election.

Measure 56 would amend the Oregon constitution so that votes on property tax measures in all May and November elections would only require a majority of "yes" votes, regardless of voter turnout.

Currently, all property tax measures require a double majority in any year when there is no general election (every odd-numbered year).

In order to pass with a double-majority, a voter turnout of more than 50 percent is required. Of that 50 percent, there must be a majority of votes in favor of the measure.

If voter turnout is less than 50 percent, each non-vote essentially counts as a vote against the measure.

Double majority became a requirement for property tax measures in 1996 with the passing of Ballot Measure 47, a Bill Sizemore-sponsored measure.

According to Sizemore, "before the double majority passed, city councilors, county commissioners, and school board members would say out loud in their public meetings that their strategy was to place their tax increase on the ballot in a small special election, because they knew it wouldn't pass in a high voter turnout general election."

Dave Hunt, Majority Leader in the Oregon House of Representatives is one of several legislators sponsoring Measure 56.

Hunt feels that Oregon's change to vote-by-mail alleviated many of the concerns that led to double majority requirements. Now that ballots are mailed out, voters are aware of most measures regardless of when they are voted on.

"There are no more sneaky measures anymore," Hunt remarked.

The necessity of a double-majority vote in property tax measures can - and does - have an impact on when these measures are put on the ballot.

COCC President, Jim Middleton feels that the issue of double majority had an impact on the timeliness of COCC's current bond measure.

"The board did consider that challenge," Middleton said of the double majority requirement. "There is a considerable amount of time and energy that goes into getting good voter turnout."

Middleton added that the board felt it was a better choice to bring the bond measure up at a time when getting a double majority would not be the primary concern.

"We wanted the focus to be on the issue, not on getting the 50 percent voter turnout."

The Crook County Parks and Recreation District also found themselves trying to sidestep the double majority requirement with their bond measure to build a new public pool.

"We definitely did not want to put the measure on the ballot in a double majority year,"

Maureen Crawford, Parks and Recreation Director for Crook County asserted.

According to Hunt, these efforts to avoid double majority elections may in fact cause higher property taxes, the opposite result Sizemore was trying to achieve.

"In 2005, Gladstone's school district needed to make building improvements for their schools. But since a property tax measure would have required a double majority that year, they waited until the 2006 general election. During that wait, building material prices went up considerably. When the measure passed, it ended up costing tax payers more money than it would have in 2005. Double majority was actually the cause of higher taxes."