

Voters say 'no' when they mean 'yes'

By MIKE HOPKINS
Of the Emerald

Journalism professor Jim Lemert knows how well election results can obscure public opinion. Sometimes voters say "no" when they mean "yes."

To get his point across, he assigned the students enrolled in his "Journalism and Public Opinion" seminar the task of determining why Eugeneans voted as they did on Ballot Measures 6 and 11, the property tax reform proposals on the Nov. 7 ballot.

The 28 students in Lemert's class polled 310 Eugene voters as they were leaving election voting stations last election day.

Lemert, director of communications research for the University's School of Journalism, designed the poll.

Interviewers asked a number of questions pertaining to Measures

Students in journalism public opinion class find post-election poll shows what voters intended

6 and 11, including how persons voted on the two plans, did they cast ballots with some strategy in mind, if they owned property and whether they preferred Democrat Bob Straub or Republican Victor Atiyeh for governor.

In designing the poll, Lemert selected certain influencing factors at random, such as city location, socio-economic status and time of day. This virtually guaranteed that the survey is accurate and representative, Lemert says.

The poll's results show:

- that few voters — less than 6 percent — voted for both measures;
- slightly more than 15 percent voted for Measure 6 and against 11;

• 43 percent of the vote favored 11 and opposed 6;

• 22 percent voted 'no' on both measures;

• slightly more than 9 percent abstained on 6 and voted for 11.

Students who noted that most voters apparently had ignored the advice of Secretary of State Norma Paulus were on the right track, Lemert says. Paulus announced before the election that citizens should not split their votes if they want one of the measures to pass.

In fact, many pro-11 voters in the Lemert poll sample had an entirely different strategy in mind. Exactly half of those who tipped the "yes" lever on 11 and "no" on 6 actually voted out of fear that Measure 6 would pass, poll results show. A third of these voters said they would not have chosen Measure 11 had it been the only tax reform proposal on the ballot.

The poll also indicates Atiyeh supporters tended to vote "yes" on Measure 6 and "no" on 11, Lemert says. Straub supporters, on the other hand, tended either to favor 11 and oppose 6 or to vote against both measures.

Property ownership also influenced voter behavior. Among Measure 6 voters a disproportionate number owned property,

especially property other than a personal residence. Renters leaned more toward Measure 11, Lemert says.

Now that survey results are in, Lemert has a hunch the poll data admittedly won't verify.

Two Bardsley Polls published in the Portland Oregonian before the election showed Measure 11 gaining and possibly passing Measure 6. Although he can't prove it, Lemert "has the feeling" that the Bardsley Poll results caused Measure 6 supporters — who perhaps had expressed support for Measure 11 at the time the Bardsley Polls were taken to withhold support for Measure 11 in the voting booth.

The result was to deny 11 the winning margin. The presence of two tax proposals on the ballot definitely helped defeat both, Lemert feels (although he "refuses to get sucked into" saying Straub and the state legislators who devised Measure 11 planned it that way).

To prove his hypothesis would require another, more complete poll of all Oregon voters, Lemert cautions. The poll conducted by his students did not, for example, include questions designed to determine the influence of pre-election surveys on voting behavior.

However, to Lemert's knowledge, his class' project was the only poll taken in Oregon after the Nov. 7 election.

"Pollsters are rewarded for pre-election polls, not for post-election polls," he says.

Pre-election polls can only predict how many people will vote a certain way, Lemert says. When the media faithfully report pre-election survey results, they are indulging in little more than "curiosity satisfaction."

Post-election polls, on the other

hand, explain what the voters were trying to say, he explains.

Considering the money and energy typically poured into elections, the media ought to consider "what the voters tried to say" more important. As it is, "there's tremendous room for disagreement over the meaning of elections," Lemert says.

To illustrate his point, Lemert cites the 1968 New Hampshire presidential primary, in which Eugene McCarthy did far better than expected against Pres. Lyndon Johnson. The press widely interpreted McCarthy's showing as an expression of opposition to the Vietnam War.

However, a post-election survey revealed voter disenchantment over "the social issue" — i.e., amidst a plethora of sometimes violent anti-war protests, many New Hampshire voters felt Johnson wasn't running a tight ship and sent their message by voting for McCarthy.

About three-fifths of McCarthy voters, the post-election study showed, were hawks, and fully two-thirds didn't know how McCarthy stood on the war.

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Supporters say the boycott, which was organized by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, will continue until the company bargains collectively with its 44,000 employees. In Eugene, the boycott has been active for the last two years and 18 local unions and many civic and church groups have passed resolutions supporting the boycott.

For more information contact Roberta Tiu-Retz at 942-9262.

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