

Kids First puts kids in jeopardy

Kati Neville, Lisa Bigaouette and Bobby Lee.

On November 8th, you will be asked to cast your vote to help determine the economic and social direction of this state. The choice over ballot measures may at first seem obvious, but in reality they could have devastating effects on Oregon's future. One of those measures is "Kids First" or Ballot Measure 15.

This measure, if passed, could result in an increase of college tuition by 30 percent in each of the next two years and the cutting of significant funding to crime prevention, corrections, human services and state programs, including the Oregon Health Plan.

Measure 15 would constitutionally require the Legislature to fund schools and community colleges (K-14) at no less than the base amount designated in the 1993-95 biennium, with adjustments for enrollment and inflation. This means the state's contribution to school funding will be increased in 1995-97 from \$2.9 to \$4.3 billion, an annual increase of \$713 million. All this without increasing taxes. Sound good? Who would deny that taking care of our children, our future, should not be a priority? The kicker is that the additional allocation to schools has to come from somewhere.

With the passage of Measure 15, K-14 schools will be receiving about 60 percent of the \$6.9 billion general fund, up 43 percent from the current budget. This leaves approximately 30 percent (after allocations are made to programs that receive federal matching funds) to be split between all other state agencies and programs. These agencies and programs are already facing 12-15 percent budget cuts due to the passage of

Measure 5 in 1990. If no alternative source of funding is found, programs such as higher education, crime prevention and corrections would be cut an additional 18-25 percent. All state agencies will find themselves on the cutting block while K-14 remains the sacred lamb in the state's turbulent budgetary times.

Our state is experiencing a major transition from an economy based on natural resources to dependency on human resources. We are continually moving toward a knowledge based economy. Oregon employment trends show that there will be over 400,000 new jobs in the next decade which will require a college degree.

Oregon needs to develop its human resources to meet this demand and be able to fully realize the benefits of this new economy. However, at the same time that the need for individuals with college education becomes greater, passage of Measure 15 would make higher education unattainable for many Oregonians.

If Measure 15 passes:

- The Oregon State Board of Higher Education might raise tuition by 30 percent over the next two years. In-state tuition would go up to \$4,000 next year and \$5,500 the following year, pricing approximately 8,000 students out of higher education.

- Or, not raise tuition and instead cut enrollment by 8,000. This number is equivalent to the total incoming freshman or transfer students next year.

- At least one state penitentiary would have to be shut down, most likely the Eastern Oregon Corrections Institution in Pendleton. This would mean the release of approximately 1,500 convicted criminals.

- Between 200 and 350 Oregon State Police would be laid

off.

- Up to 13,000 violent offenders on parole or probation would no longer be supervised.

- The Children Services Division will face cuts so deep that reports of child abuse to children over the age of 5 may have to go unaddressed, accounting for 77 percent of the total cases reported.

- State services which provide jobs and homes to Oregonians with disabilities may have to be cut completely, affecting 5,000 people.

Rather than increasing funding to one area at the expense of others, what we need is an adequate and stable funding source, which inevitably means tax reform. This is not easy because any solution must first deal with the politically painful decisions required to reform any tax system.

Advocates for Measure 15 argue that the passage of this measure will help make it clear that we need meaningful tax reform. But will this really happen? Many people doubt it. The fate of statewide tax measures in Oregon since 1968 has shown clearly that most of those passed were tied to public school funding. This means that future tax reform will be even more difficult if the public thinks that the school funding problem is solved by the passage of Measure 15.

This measure is a dangerous "solution" to a complex problem. We believe that Measure 15 is a selfish policy which puts our state decades behind the changing demand of Oregon's economy, and more importantly, puts kids at risk both inside and outside of the classroom. Please vote NO on Measure 15.

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