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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

CONTACT US
BY MAIL: P.O. Box 3159,
 Eugene, OR 97403
BY PHONE: (541) 346-5511
BY E-MAIL: ode@oregon.
 uoregon.edu
IN PERSON: Suite 300, EMU

Property lines divided over Measure 47

OUR OPINION: The property tax measure leaves schools too vulnerable to legislative laziness and circumstance

After a cursory look, Measure 47 should be a no-brainer. As students of the largest four-year university in Oregon, it should be easy for us to vote no without any hesitation — and without any thought.

Exactly what this measure does and the possible ramifications resulting from it need to be examined closely before a true decision can be made. Yes, it cuts state property taxes in the 1996-97 tax year, either by 10 percent or by reverting to the 1994-95 level, whichever is smaller. And yes, it limits future property tax increases to 3 percent per year. But its effect on public higher education is far from concrete.

Bill Sizemore from Oregon Taxpayers United, the only publicly visible supporter of the measure, says funding for schools has gone up, not down, since Measure 5 passed in 1990. And if Measure 47 passes, it will continue to "protect" schools just like Measure 5 before it. This is assuming the State Legislature will be creative enough to replace an estimated \$574 million in school funding in 1997-99, the amount 47 will cut according to the Legislative Revenue Office.

Sizemore says the Legislature can do it. They did it before, why not again? But by cutting \$1 billion from the State General Fund, the primary source of school funding, making up the difference will not be easy. In fact, the job will most likely be done by the schools themselves.

The University adjusted to Measure 5 and even thrived in many ways. But not before eliminating almost 30 academic programs, raising tuition by 80 percent and seeing the state slide to 50th in the country in funding for higher education. And the future doesn't seem any brighter under Measure 47.

Sizemore says state income tax and lottery dollars will fill the financial deficit created by 47. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee a surplus of money will be available, let alone used for schools. Unlike Measure 5, Measure 47 doesn't require the state to make up the revenues lost to property tax reductions. It simply requires public schools and safety be "prioritized."

Prioritization is meaningless if there is no money in the first place. Lottery dollars and income tax are unreliable, and if the money isn't there, the state doesn't have to create it. Ultimately, funding for schools after 47 is possible but far from guaranteed.

On a more practical level, the University is still struggling. Professors are still overloaded. Students are still disenchanted by huge classes and a lack of a "personal touch." With one more year of Measure 5 to go, the University is almost free of major financial intrusions. It can begin to prepare for a huge onslaught of new students before the end of the century. Measure 47 would start the process all over again.

Even President Frohnmayer said the University doesn't "have a major contingency plan that would deal with that magnitude of problem." The effects of Measure 47 have too much disastrous potential, too many possible negatives to even plan for.

The risk is too much to gamble on. Vote no on Measure 47.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

ANOTHER VIEW: All Oregonians will benefit from a property tax reduction, even renters

The case for Measure 47 is overwhelming. For starters, this year inflation is running at less than 3 percent. Wages and cost of living allowances are increasing at only 2 to 3 percent. So how is it right that property taxes this year are going to increase by 10 to 20 percent?

How are everyday working and retired Oregonians supposed to pay taxes that increase at more than three times the rate of inflation and the rate at which incomes are increasing?

Almost no one would support a tax of 25 to 50 percent on people whose incomes are at half the poverty level. That would be unconscionable. Yet that is exactly what we are doing in Oregon with our current property tax system. Tens of thousands of elderly Oregonians who live on monthly social security checks of \$400 to \$500 are required to pay \$100 to \$200 per month in property taxes, leaving only a tiny amount of money each month to pay for food and utilities. How unjust!

Measure 47 meets Oregon's property tax problem head on. The measure gives property owners a modest 10 percent property tax reduction, but the tax is then capped so it cannot increase more than 3 percent per year — in most cases regardless of what happens to assessments.

Though all property owners will benefit from the measure, the majority of savings will not go to commercial property owners, but to hard-pressed residential taxpayers.

Even renters will benefit from the passage of Measure 47, because when property taxes go up, so do rents. Landlords cannot reasonably be expected to simply absorb the coming property tax increases. So if Measure 47 does not pass, those huge tax increases will be passed on to renters in the form of higher rents.

Opponents of Measure 47 are trying to draw attention away from the coming property tax explosion. They are saying that Measure 47 is not really about limiting property taxes, but about local control. What's fascinating about this claim is that the facts indicate that it is entirely groundless. Oregon law requires that the ballot title of a measure must state what the measure is really about. In the case of Measure 47, Oregon's Attorney General and Supreme Court have officially certified a ballot title that says Measure 47 is about reducing and limiting property taxes. The ballot title says nothing about local control.

Predictably, politicians and bureaucrats are making doom and gloom prophecies of wholesale devastation for government if taxpayers are allowed to keep more of their money. Their claims regarding a "loss of local control" and "dead people voting" are merely desperate attempts to divert attention away from skyrocketing property taxes. This much is clear: If Measure 47 does not pass, property taxes on average Oregon homes will increase \$500 to \$1,000 by 1998, and a lot of good, decent folks will suffer real hardship. That fact should be of overwhelming concern to every voter and every elected official who has sworn to serve the people of Oregon.

Measure 47 is a good measure. It will place a reasonable limit on the growth of property taxes once and for all. Its 3 percent cap on annual increases is fair for taxpayers and fair for government.

Bill Sizemore, executive director of Oregon Taxpayers United, is the author of Measure 47.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

LETTERS

Men forgotten

It was with great disgust that I read "Help available for all eating disorders" (*ODE*, Oct. 21). Ten years ago, I was afflicted with an eating disorder for approximately two years. I am not now, nor was I was during that time period, a female.

When I read doctorate student and "eating disorder specialist" Britta Dinsmore quoted as saying: "We help women..." and "women have to..." I was overcome with intense anger. How dare these so-called specialists perpetuate such stereotypes? While women may have a much higher incidence of eating disorders, they are by no means the only gender to be affected by these illnesses.

The article also quotes Judy Sonnenberg, University psychologist, as stating: "Women are often ashamed..." and paraphrases her as stating that "women are at different levels." Perhaps Dinsmore, who isn't yet a licensed professional, has an excuse for ignorance in her specialty, but the University is paying the salary of Sonnenberg while she perpetuates a serious and dangerous fallacy.

Shame on these two individuals and on the *Emerald's* editors for not questioning this blatant misrepresentation and bias. Such disregard can only drive males affected by these illnesses further into shame and guilt and away from treatment.

Jonathan Bricker
 Economics

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P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

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Newsroom (541) 346-5511

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