

CONTACTING US

NEWSROOM: (541) 346-5511
E-MAIL: ode@oregon.uoregon.edu
ONLINE EDITION: darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ode

ADDRESS: Oregon Daily Emerald
 P.O. BOX 3159
 Eugene, Oregon 97403

PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
 Sarah Kickler
EDITORIAL EDITOR
 Mike Schmierbach
NIGHT EDITOR
 Mike Schmierbach

Legislature fails to respect voters' wishes

By sending Measure 16 back to the voters as Measure 51, the Legislature has insulted the decision-making ability of Oregonians.

Once upon a time, there was a city called Athens. In Athens, they had a system known as democracy, in which all the male citizens got together and voted on the fate of their community.

Time passed. Athens got conquered many times over for reasons historians still debate.

Eventually, a bunch of guys got tired of paying taxes, so they revolted. The results of that revolution were a new nation, the United States, and a new system of government.

This system has at times been called a democracy. It is not. The United States is in fact a republic, in which the citizens elect representatives. These representatives then vote on the fate of their community.

In Athens, people voted for whatever suited their needs. In the United States, representatives vote for the needs of whomever gives them the most money. Both systems have their flaws.

In many Western states, an attempt to compensate for these flaws has been made — the referendum. In a referendum, voters decide upon legislation themselves, rather than trusting the legislature to screw it up for them.

Oregon, as you probably know, is one of these states. Recently, however, it seems the Legislature has decided that, if the voters make decisions themselves, corporations will give less money to the representatives.

Or not. Regardless, the Oregon Legislature has directly altered or contradicted the wishes of the voters by "fixing" laws passed by the initiative process.

One such bill, Measure 47, was placed back on the ballot as Measure 50. The measure was a new and improved tax cut, one less likely to flunk a constitutional test and more likely to conceal the real cost of the ignorance of Oregon's voters.

Worse, the Legislature further insulted the voters by changing Measure 50 after it had already been placed on the ballot, essentially proclaiming that the voters were little more than a rubber stamp for legislative needs.

Now, the Oregon Legislature has topped itself. In 1994, the voters narrowly passed Measure 16, which legalized doctor assisted suicide.

At the urging of Gov. John Kitzhaber, among others, the Legislature took up the issue. The idea was that it would do to Measure 16 what it did to Measure 47 — fix some of the questionable language while, in theory, leaving the voters' intent intact.

Instead, the Legislature decided we hadn't done our homework and sent Measure 16 back to the ballot as Measure 51. A yes vote on 51 would overturn 16, maintaining the status quo in Oregon, where assisted suicide is currently illegal.

Regardless of the merits of assisted suicide (which will be addressed in Tuesday's Emerald), we think Measure 51 should be rejected as insult-



AN EMERALD EDITORIAL
 Part 1 of 2

ing to the voters of Oregon.

If the Legislature was concerned with ambiguities contained within Measure 16, it should have addressed those concerns differently. Either by lobbying during the initial vote or by recommending changes in the wording of the measure, the Legislature could have improved the law without violating the wishes of Oregon's voters.

Instead, Oregon's official lawmakers have decided to bar all those without an office in Salem from participating in the legislative process. The precedent set by the Measure 51 fiasco is frightening; each time a law passes that the Legislature does not favor, it can simply send it back to the voters.

The situation is rather like a teacher standing in front of a classroom, asking her students questions: "Does anyone here have an opinion on assisted suicide?"

"Yes, I'm in favor of it."

"Sorry, Timmy. That's wrong. Let's try again."

The voters of Oregon did their homework in 1994. Despite being overwhelmingly outspent, the proponents of Measure 16 won. Assisted suicide should be legal by now. Instead, all the citizens of Oregon have received is another insult from their representatives.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Thumbs



TO PORTLAND: The city already has a law requiring all its agencies to treat people of every sexual orientation equally. Now it has proposed expanding this law to include businesses contracted to do work for the city. It makes no sense to allow companies to treat employees differently because of whom the employees sleep with, and Portland has taken an important step in expanding common sense.



TO CASSINI: The probe, which will explore Saturn, contains more than 50 pounds of plutonium. NASA insists this plutonium is perfectly safe and there is no risk of it contaminating the Earth. This is the same NASA that insisted the space shuttle could never blow up. It is also the same NASA that has seen two rockets explode on the launch pad or shortly after liftoff in the last couple years. The risk of radiation from Cassini may be very low, but the scientific need to send a probe to Saturn is even lower. Why risk the entire Earth for a little planet watching?

TO THE ADD-DROP DEADLINE: While we agree with administrative concerns about getting into classes after two or three weeks, we don't think a week is long enough to get a clear idea of how a class will affect your workload or what a professor will be like. If students are having a hard time getting classes, policies concerning wait lists and expanded class sizes need to be refined and clarified.

DRAWING BOARD

