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Apathy shouldn't be a political force



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

Measure 53 would help resolve power to concerned members of the community

It's not every day that a political advertisement features a lazy, slovenly couch potato. It's not every day that an advertisement manages to so completely alienate a large segment of the population, especially an ad for a political cause.

Normally, such a strategy would be suicidal. In the case of the proponents of Ballot Measure 53, however, the strategy makes perfect sense. The alienated group is non-voters, and non-voters don't have much political power.

Or, at least, they didn't before the passage of Measure 47. When that measure, revised in Measure 50, passed, it thrust a great deal of power into the hands of non-voters.

After Measure 50 became law, a disturbing new era in revenue raising came into existence. From that point forward, almost all property-tax increases required not only approval from a majority of voters but also

voter turnout of more than 50 percent in order to pass.

Measure 53 would repeal this unfortunate provision. Despite the large sums of money pouring into anti-53 campaigns, the vast majority of thoughtful, educated and politically active voters and politicians in Oregon clearly support the repeal.

Even the Oregon Legislature, which certainly hasn't proven to be an advocate for radical increases in revenue sources, backs the measure. In fact, 53 was placed on the ballot by the Legislature.

The reason so many groups support the measure is clear; Measure 50 and its double-majority provision have crippled local governments.

Traditionally, city and county agencies have relied upon bond measures funded through property-tax revenues to pay for vital community services such as libraries, parks and prisons. Now, any time those communities aren't able to rouse half the registered voters to cast ballots, the measure automatically fails.

Apathy has become a major political

tool, and it is preventing governments from raising much-needed revenue.

Measure 53 would return the power of the ballot to those who bother to cast one.

Opponents of the measure complain that it could potentially increase taxes by making property-tax changes easier to pass. We certainly hope so.

In the wake of Measures 5 and 50, local property-tax revenue has plummeted, leaving the state to fund schools and communities with little or no control over their children's education or their quality of life. Worse, the percentage of the tax burden that falls upon individuals has risen dramatically, while corporations pay for ever-smaller portions of the community they draw workers and customers from.

By carefully targeting businesses and homeowners who buy massive homes and drive affordable housing and middle-class families out of the market, property taxes could help restore some degree of equity.

That process will require an end to the absurdity of the double-majority requirement.

The Legislature raises another important argument for Measure 53 in its voter pamphlet statement. Currently, the double-majority rule makes for a great deal of election controversy, which drives county and state elections officials to carefully verify the existence and validity of registered voters. After all, an inaccurate count could cost the election.

This requires a considerable amount of time and money; both would be saved by the passage of Measure 53.

Ballot Measure 53 wouldn't necessarily raise taxes, save communities or rescue schools. It would ensure that tax opponents aren't allowed to use apathy as a weapon any longer.

Voting takes little more than getting off the couch long enough to find a pencil. But it does require that effort, and those who aren't willing to make it shouldn't be able to cripple our communities.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Accountability key

The students have spoken. Many of us like OSPIRG and agree with OSPIRG but insist on accountability. The Oregonian mentioned that Bill Miner is blaming "conservatives and corporations" for the election results, and OSPIRG state chair Glenda Marshall hopes "students will fight back."

No corporation or political party had anything to do with my vote. I read pamphlets and looked at a Web site that voiced some concerns I already had. As a student, there is nobody for me to fight back against.

Instead of looking for technicalities to kill the election on, OSPIRG supporters should consider the election a mandate for accountability. Perhaps each campus chapter should be autonomous; other student groups do quite well without professional staff and an office in Portland. I've been involved with OSPIRG in the past and would be interested in being part of it again if it can demonstrate that it is responsive to concerns of the students.

Michael Medlock
Biology

Little righteousness

I'm responding to the Emerald's endorsement of the Public Employees' Benefit Board decision to provide health and dental benefits to unmarried partners of Oregon state public employees. It's not surprising in the environment at the University, as well as Eugene in particular, that such an endorsement is heartily approved. It's no secret that a large, vocal minority dominates much of the policy here and practices a subtle form of intimidation to make it seem as if everyone supports gay rights here in this community.

I work with Kelly Matchett-Morris in housing and be-

lieve that he has every right to be an advocate for his cause. I don't agree with him, nor would I support any heterosexual man or woman gaining benefits for their partners. We as a society are witnessing the complete breakdown of moral standards at every level, in every part of the world — from genocide in Cambodia, Africa, East Timor and Bosnia to children in this country killing children. There have been more than 30 million babies killed in their mother's wombs in just the United States alone. Starvation has killed so many millions that to see it on the news any more is to wonder why ... why ... why.

We simply don't get it. We cannot solve our differences, cannot cure illnesses and cannot solve starvation as long as we each decide what is right in our own hearts. How could any father in Serbia kill Bosnian children? Why does a 12-year-old boy decide to shoot his teacher and classmates? How could AIDS have spread and continue to spread? I am one of over 35 million Americans who now have herpes. I got it many years ago from my ex-wife, who got it before we were married. We are in a world caught up in doing whatever we want, when we want and damn the consequences.

There is very little righteous good in any of us, and it's believing that we can solve our own inequities that brings us closer to that time when God says enough. So if you heartily approve of the Emerald's endorsement, maybe you should give some thought to what God thinks about it. If you're not a believer in the God of Abraham, Moses, Daniel and David and don't believe he sent his son Jesus Christ to live here, minister here, die here and rise up from death, then what I've just written means little to you. So consider this final paragraph:

God doesn't ever turn his back on us unless we turn ours first, and as we saw in the case of Karla Faye Tucker,

even the worst crime is forgivable by God. If we'll turn about and face him and ask him for forgiveness and guidance, he'll head us out of any circumstance that we've allowed ourselves to buy into. Many are saying that there is little time left to get right with the creator of our world, so consider whether some small, insignificant gain is worth losing out on eternity spent in the presence of God.

Gordon Melby
University Housing

Miner acts 'insane'

It is now obvious that ASUO President Bill Miner is insane. There is no other possible explanation for his paranoid statements to the Emerald, The Register-Guard and The Oregonian, blaming conservatives and corporations for the defeat of OSPIRG. What corporations? Nike? Microsoft? He claims that OSPIRG was defeated by a right-wing conspiracy, and he is now trying to void the election results based on the claim that an anti-OSPIRG activist used a bullhorn while campaigning. Miner has truly gone off the deep end if he thinks that OSPIRG was defeated because of conservatives. Quite the contrary, OSPIRG was defeated by students of all political persuasions who had one belief in common: that \$147,000 is too much money for OSPIRG. Those who supported OSPIRG assisted in the defeat by refusing to submit a line-item budget and insisting on an all-or-nothing ballot measure. Many of those who voted against OSPIRG weren't against the program but were against spending the exorbitant amount of money to fund it. Why was OSPIRG defeated? Because they got greedy, just like the multi-national corporations they oppose. Other programs on campus do far more with far less money.

Ryan Osisit
Director, Designated Driver Shuttle