


Oregon unions oppose slew of Sizemore-sponsored measures

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Oregon voters will see 12 measures on their mail-in ballots this fall: eight citizen initiatives and four legislative referrals.

The four referrals (Measures 54 through 57) are likely to get labor support, but all but one of the initiatives are opposed by organized labor.

Unions have not yet taken a position on Measure 65, which would change the primary election. But unions and other opponents of the measures have formed a group — Defend Oregon — to oppose Measures 58 through 64. The measures are sponsored by long-time labor adversaries, including Bill Sizemore; several of the proposals have been rejected by voters before.

As he has in previous years, Sizemore appears to have written the measures specifically to tie up the resources of his adversaries. Some measures will be fought especially hard by public school teachers, others by all public employees, and one is sure to galvanize building trades union members. A pair of crime-related measures sponsored by Kevin Mannix also is being opposed by organized labor.

What follows is a summary of the measures.


MEASURE 58: Prohibits teaching public school students in a language other than English for more than two years. Oregon has about 74,000 K-12 public school students learning English as a second language. Most are taught in classes where the language instruction takes place in English — until they are assessed as proficient in English. But some get tutors in their own language to keep them from falling behind their peers in subjects like math and science. And it's up to local districts whether to offer classes in other languages. In some cases, classes are offered in foreign languages both to help native speakers keep up and to help non-native speakers gain proficiency in a foreign language. Current Oregon law requires

that all such programs be justified by research. Sizemore has no background in education, and has never taught public schools, but his measure would do away with much of that, mandating a two-year limit for instruction in any foreign language except when native English speakers are the ones being instructed. Similar measures have passed in California and Arizona. Oregon Education Association spokesperson Becca Uherbelau said Oregon teachers oppose the measure as an uninformed intrusion into educational practice, and an unfunded mandate that takes away local control of schools. Arizona school administrators estimate the requirement there is costing \$2,741 extra per student per year. Based partly on that figure, the official explanatory statement that will accompany Measure 58 on the Oregon ballot estimates the measure could cost \$203 to \$253 million a year extra — for extra teaching staff needed to meet the federal No Child Left Behind requirement that all students make satisfactory progress.

MEASURE 59: Creates an unlimited deduction for federal income taxes on individual taxpayers' Oregon income tax returns. When you fill out your state income tax return, you get to reduce the amount of taxable income you report to the state by the amount of federal income tax you paid — up to a limit that's currently \$5,500. That limit doesn't affect most Oregon taxpayers, because only 28 percent are paying more than that amount of federal income tax. So removing the limit benefits only those higher-income taxpayers. Chuck Sheketoff of the Oregon Center for Public Policy estimates half the tax savings from this measure would go to the top 1 percent. And it's expected this ballot measure would reduce revenues to the State of Oregon by \$360 million the first year, \$1 billion the second year, and \$1.3 billion after that. That's a hit of 9 percent of the state's general fund, and it would rise over time. Unlike the feds, states can't borrow money, so revenue cuts would either need to be matched with new taxes elsewhere or cuts in spending. The state spends 54 percent of its

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