

# Measuring up

Street Roots weighs in on relevant local and state measures before voters this year. All conclusions were reached by a consensus of Street Roots staff, volunteers and vendors, with consideration on how the laws will affect people experiencing poverty

## Libraries

26-143: Create a Multnomah County Library District with permanent rate to fund library services.

This measure seeks to create a taxing district specifically to fund the Multnomah County library system. If approved, the district levy would be a rate of \$1.22 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Currently the libraries are funded through renewable levies.

**Yes** Libraries are one of the last resources for public knowledge, research and cultural enrichment that are universally accessible to the public, regardless of income, stature or resources. But such an asset does not come without the community's investment.

**No** This measure will also replace the patchwork levy process that exists now. It will dedicate funding for this valuable resource, freeing up other dollars for social services for families experiencing homelessness and poverty.

## Portland Public Schools

26-144: Portland Public School District Bonds to Improve Schools - Portland School District

This measure seeks to issue a bond in the amount of \$482 million in order to help pay for three new high schools in the district as well as general improvement and renovation projects as needed. If approved, a levy addition of \$1.10 per \$1,000 of assessed value would be implemented in the district to pay for the bond.

**Yes** Our schools need our help, but let's face it, the improvement proposal floated in the spring was too much and too haphazard to galvanize real support from the community at large. This proposal brings it more down to size, with public involvement and a more equal distribution of assistance for long-neglected facilities. Education is so critical for the wellbeing of future Portlanders, and we hold a responsibility to getting all students on an level course toward success.

## Restore school arts

26-146: Restore School Arts, Music Education; Fund Arts through Limited Tax: City of Portland

This measure seeks to implement a tax set at a rate of \$35 per person living in the city. The tax would apply to any resident over the age of 18 who earns money and is above the federal poverty line.

**Yes** Art is everywhere in Portland. It's at the core of our city's personality. But in our core institutions, particularly for children and the poor, art is either nonexistent or out of financial and social reach. The benefits of arts training – on math skills, cognitive processing and simply our joie de vie – are well documented. For \$35 per person, we can fund not only public school programs but also programs generating community involvement among people who are social and economically marginalized.

**No** There are caveats, to be sure, and the administration of this new tax has to ensure that it does not become a burden to the very people it is intended to help.

## Fire, police retirement

26-145: Amends Charter: Changes provisions of the city's fire police disability retirement system

If approved, this measure would amend the Portland City Charter, changing the Fire and Police Disability Retirement System. These changes would include clarifying the calculation of benefits, no longer including service by another employer for calculation of service credit, defining service requirements for disability, altering benefits for part-time employees and changing the vesting period for non-service related death benefits from 10 years to 5 years. The estimated total savings from all the changes is approximately \$46.6 million over 25 years.

**Yes** The last line says a lot. The majority of the savings come in curbing the manipulation of final-year income measures, meaning – like the rest of us – benefits are based on the actual final year of pay. And it shifts payments for injuries incurred during probationary periods to the Oregon workers compensation program. We want our firefighters and police taken care of in the event of a disability, and this measure lets us continue to do the right thing without expensive loopholes.



## Inheritance tax

84: Phases out existing inheritance taxes on large estates, and all taxes on intra-family property transfers

Summary: Current state law imposes one-time tax on estate of person dying on/after January 1, 2006, if estate's gross value – determined by federal law as of December 31, 2000 – is at least \$1,000,000. Current law taxes income-producing property sales, regardless of parties' relationship.

**Yes** If you inherit an estate worth \$1 million or more, you have acquired a measure of great wealth and you should pay taxes on it. The argument of double taxation, that opponents of estate taxes often use, holds no water here. Value and wealth change hands every day, for the advancement of many, and property is no exception. Moreover, property can accrue "unrealized" capital that is never taxed unless it is sold. Taxes are the responsibility of every citizen of means to support the local and national wellbeing, including feeding the hungry and educating our children. We can't afford to write in yet another loophole for the wealthy to skirt that responsibility.

## Casinos

Measures 82 and 83: Amends Constitution: Authorizes establishment of privately owned casinos; mandates percentage of revenues payable to dedicated state fund.

Currently, Oregon Constitution prohibits the operation of any casino within state (Outside of tribal ownership). Under this measure, the state lottery shall permit the operation of privately owned casinos within the state, provided that the particular operation is approved through initiative law. If the privately owned casino is to be located within an incorporated city, city electors must also approve casino location. The privately-owned casino shall pay 25 percent of adjusted gross revenues each month to a fund created by law for the purposes of fostering job growth, educational achievement, vibrant local communities, protecting and improving natural environment, and supporting all federally recognized Indian tribes in Oregon.

**Yes** Indeed, gambling can be fun, and there's nothing wrong with that. But there is a reason that vice is best kept in check. The proliferation of gambling centers is a regressive model for extracting tax dollars from middle- and low-income Oregonians. This is a service no one is clamoring for, so it is being sold as a jobs package with a bonus pay-off for the state. In exchange, we get low-wage service sector positions and millions of dollars siphoned out of Oregon's economy. Oh, and a constitution that now says we're OK with that, so everybody join in!

**No** Oregon has its share of gambling facilities, and we have a practical system in place to keep this vice under some measure of control. We cannot afford to expand this poor man's taxing industry further in our state.

## Marijuana cultivation/sale

80: Allows personal marijuana, hemp cultivation/use without license; commission to regulate commercial marijuana cultivation/sale

Summary: Currently, marijuana cultivation, possession and delivery are prohibited; regulated medical marijuana use permitted. Measure replaces state, local marijuana laws except medical marijuana and driving under the influence laws; distinguishes "hemp" from "marijuana"; prohibits regulation of hemp. Creates commission to license marijuana cultivation by qualified persons and to purchase entire crop.

**Yes** It's time Oregon pushed the envelope on the issue of hemp production, marijuana use and government oversight, and this bill will do just that. It's far from a panacea on the nonsense of our war on drugs. But it is a starting point that can draw out new ideas on the matter of managing a long-distorted crop that has potential in many markets.

## Real estate transfer tax

79: Amends Constitution: Prohibits real estate transfer taxes, fees, other assessments, except those operative on December 31, 2009

Summary: Current statutory law prohibits a city, county, district, or other political subdivision or municipal corporation from imposing taxes or fees on the transfer of real estate (with certain exceptions). However, the state legislature has the authority, subject to Governor approval, to impose such taxes and fees or to change current statutory law.

**Yes** We do not want a private, national trade organization spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in our state to rewrite our constitution under the fog of false necessity. We have a statewide ban on real estate transfer taxes. We have a system that allows for the people of Oregon, our elected officials and due public process to both keep it that way and reserve the right to consider our options for the future.

**No** Likewise, real estate transfer fees are not the taxation boogie men they have been made out to be. They can be constructed to provide relief to first-time homebuyers, lower-priced homes and long-term homeowners. And they can be directed to support real community needs, right here in Oregon, in ways that benefits all residents.

This measure isn't something Oregon wants or needs.

## Corporate kicker

85: Amends Constitution: Allocates corporate income/excise tax "kicker" refund to additionally fund K through 12 public education

Summary: Before each biennium, the governor must prepare an estimate of revenues expected to be received by the General Fund for the next biennium. The General Fund is the primary funding source for schools, prisons, social services other state-funded programs/services. Current law requires an automatic "kicker" refund of corporate income and excise tax revenue when that revenue exceeds estimated collections by two percent or more. Measure allocates the corporate income and excise tax "kicker" refund to the General Fund to provide additional funding for K through 12 public education. Measure does not change the constitutional personal income tax "kicker" provision.

**Yes** Measure 85 will not solve the state's education funding issues – the state's tax system is broken far beyond one or two simple repairs. This measure is hopefully the first of many to begin working on fixing that system – something that the leadership in Salem has been unable or unwilling to do.

**No** Street Roots supports the passage of Measure 85, not because we think it will fix the broken tax system and result in proper funding for education. We support the passage of this measure as a first step in tackling a seriously broken tax system. It is our hope that with the passage of Measure 85 many more steps will be taken to ensure that education, social services and other things that we count on the state to provide are properly funded.