

School Fund Ballot Measure Is Reviewed

Editor's Note—The following is a resume of the Constitutional amendment which the voters of Oregon will ballot on on November 7th, generally known as the school bill. The local PIA heard a general discussion of its merits, and what it proposes to do at the meeting last Thursday evening. Also included is an editorial by former Governor Charles Sprague owner of the Salem Statesman, giving his views on the proposed measure.

The Bill:

Be it enacted by the people of the State of Oregon: That the constitution of the State of Oregon shall be and the same hereby amended by adding to article VIII thereof a new section to be numbered and known as section 6, to read as follows:

Article VIII

Section 6. In addition to the income of the common school fund, the legislative assembly shall provide a state fund for support of public elementary and secondary schools. Said state fund shall include all funds derived from state taxes, as now provided by law, for support of such schools and shall be in amount sufficient to provide each year not less than forty-five cents per child per day of attendance for the school year immediately preceding, as determined by the superintendent of public instruction. The power of the legislative assembly to levy or impose any tax for said fund shall not be limited by section II, article XI, Oregon constitution.

The legislative assembly shall provide further for the annual distribution of said fund; provided, that until June 30, 1950, eight million dollars thereof shall be applied each year to reduce the property tax levies of local school districts and thereafter the legislative assembly shall determine the amount to be so applied. The amounts distributed from said fund to local school districts shall not affect the tax base of any such district within the limitation of section II, article XI, Oregon constitution.

This Amendment:

1. Makes the state responsible for approximately \$13,000,000.00

or approximately 55% of the total cost of Oregon Common School Education, and would bring Oregon out of the bottom half into the upper third of the states of the nation in the matter of state support for education.

2. Guarantees the continuance of the \$5,000,000.00 local property offset provided by the 1942 initiative measure, and provides an additional \$3,000,000.00 local property offset until 1950.

3. Includes in this state fund the revenue from the state's 2 mill elementary tax which produces approximately \$2,000,000.00 annually. This amount added to the \$8,000,000.00 local property tax offset noted above accounts for a total of \$10,000,000.00 which is a direct offset to present taxes for education in Oregon.

4. Provides additional and new revenue to schools of Oregon in an amount of approximately \$3,000,000.00 and this is the only additional fund for the common schools of Oregon involved in the measure. The \$8,000,000.00 is a tax shift from the shoulders of local districts to the state providing just and needed equalization of educational opportunities.

5. Leaves to the State Legislature the privilege and responsibility of:

- a. Determining the distribution of those funds.
- b. Determining the policy of offset, if any, after 1950.
- c. Determining the source or sources of funds. (Whether these funds shall be collected from some one source, or many sources may be determined from time to time as conditions change and in accordance with the wishes of the citizens of Oregon. At the present time the state has reduced its income tax rates to prevent surpluses.

6. Causes the state to provide in a real and substantial way for the common school of Oregon.

7. Establishes a substantial minimum for state school support.

8. Keeps and makes effective the intent of the framers of the constitution to provide for the establishment "of a uniform and general system of common schools".

This Amendment Does Not:

1. Constitute a selfish "teacher grab" but an urgent necessity to save education for Oregon children (such a constitutional support assurance will do much to improve professional standing of teaching in Oregon, attract teachers into training, retain present qualified teachers, and prevent the trends toward the tragic conditions evidenced by the lack of teachers now in training in Oregon.

(It was reported at the recent meeting of school administrators in Salem that there are only sixty-eight women and two men now in training in all of Oregon's teacher training institutions who will be eligible for certification in 1944-45 and approximately 150 additional who will be eligible for emergency certification. This makes a total of only 220 prospective teachers from all our educational centers for 1944-45, whereas Oregon required approximately 1400 new teachers this year. These figures are truly alarming.)

2. Discriminate against any school, large or small. It leaves to our legislature the method of distribution which naturally has not yet been determined.

3. Disturb the state irreducible fund or county school funds but merely supplements them.

4. Alter the districts own tax base. It clearly specifies that money received as offset by local districts does not destroy the district tax base.

5. Constitute a "first mortgage" on the state and does not jeopardize the state's own wherewithal to maintain state government. It does make education a primary concern of the state, as it should be, and protects the state's revenue needs by its provision of the 6% limitation clause.

Ballot Measures—VIII

Eighth measure on the ballot is a constitutional amendment sponsored by the Oregon State Teachers' Association which would require the state to provide revenue for the operation of elementary and high schools in the state in an amount equal to 45 cents per child per day of attendance. Method of raising the money is

left to the state legislature, but the amendment would lift to six per cent limitation from application to this fund.

Of the total sum \$8,000,000 must be applied to reduce local property taxes until the year of 1950; after that the legislature will decide how much shall be applied to this purpose. The method of distributing this fund, which will include the present state elementary school fund and the \$5,000,000 diverted from income tax proceeds under the initiative of 1942 and the act of 1943, is left to the legislature.

When we first heard that the teachers' association was proposing a constitutional amendment for establishment of state aid we were inclined to oppose it, assuming that it would be using the constitution for legislative rather than truly constitutional purposes. A study of the amendment does not bear out that fear. It proposes to establish as a principle state sharing in cost of our common schools in a substantial amount. Since the principal would be meaningless unless tied to a figure, the amendment fixes 45 cents per child per day of attendance as the measure of state aid. This is arbitrary to be sure; but any figure would be arbitrary and no figure would leave the amendment empty of meaning.

Next the amendment frees rather than restricts the legislature giving it power (irrespective of the six per cent limitation) to provide the revenues from what sources it chooses or can find; power also to determine the way the fund be applied to offset school district property taxes. Thus the amendment involves one principle: a mandate for state contribution to schools in a definite amount; and secondly gives the legislature wide latitude in carrying out the mandate. The Statesman has come to the conclusion on analysis of the proposed amendment that it is entirely proper matter both in substance and form to go into the constitution. In fact, it is hard to see how that step could be avoided if the six per cent limitation is to be gotten round.

So much for the constitutional amendment points which has been raised in discussions of the

measure. Now what about its merits?

In the past Oregon has depended very largely on local school districts taxes supplemented by a county tax (also a property tax) and a state elementary school tax (also a property tax until very late years) for financing its schools. If school children were distributed geographically in exact proportion to assessed valuation the distribution of the burden of education would be equalized. That condition does not exist and has not for decades, if it ever did. As a result there is wide disparity in school taxation. The writer in his message to the legislature in 1939 reported:

Of the 2085 school districts of the state, 691 levy no special tax for elementary schools. For other districts the taxes range as high as 50.7 mills.

There are two ways to equalize the tax burden: one would be to consolidate districts into larger units, through subsequent changes would again bring about inequality; the other method is to provide a larger sum from the state treasury and lighten the burden on the local districts. The pending amendment will increase substantially the amount of the state school fund; and if the legislature provides for its equitable distribution then there will be an evening up of the burden of school support.

Objections are raised, especially by taxpayer groups, against this measure on the ground that if the income tax receipts should shrink to pre-war levels the burden would fall on property. It is true that property is "exposed" to additional burden by this amendment, but only in the event other present or prospective tax sources prove inadequate, or the legislature and the people prefer to have property assume this burden.

The Statesman suggests that it is time the people of the state looked at their schools from another angle than how cheaply they can run them.

The war has brought home to Oregon school directors the fact that they have to compete for instructors. Teachers' salaries in Washington and California are substantially higher than in Oregon. The state department of

education has had to give emergency certificates to scores of teachers who cannot qualify under regular standards.

Nor is the condition one which will clear up with the end of the war. Our colleges of education are almost empty of students, including women, preparing for a teaching career. Some months ago this editor made a study of the changes among high school principals and superintendents in Oregon cities. The facts, which were published, should alarm parents of children of school age. They showed our schools were becoming starved at the top because of the loss of able men as school administrators.

We submit that the time has come for the people of Oregon to face the facts. These facts point to this, that increased funds MUST be provided for the operation of our schools if we are going to maintain even the present standards (which are none too high). To do this by taking the six per cent limitation off of local district taxes would mean that property alone would bear the whole burden, because that is the only taxing power a local school board has.

Moreover there would then be no limit and directors and patrons might "shoot the works" for their school and soak the railroads, the utilities and other non-resident property owners. The proposed state fund sets a limit at the same time it applies a mandate; 45 cents per child per day; and the legislature has broad taxing powers, made broader by this amendment. The additional revenue is not exorbitant in amount or beyond the capacity of the people to pay.

The amendment is timely; it is practical; it is just; it is necessary. The Statesman strongly urges Vote 314 X Yes.



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