

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Measure 47 is still causing problems

The optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds; the pessimist fears this is true.

James B. Cabell
The Silver Stallion, 1926

Before considering Ballot Measure 50, let's revisit the worst part of Ballot Measure 47, hereinafter called BM47.

If you want to vote yes on a measure to fix the road in front of your house, do you want your vote cancelled by someone who didn't even remember there was an election?

If you voted for BM47, you answered in the affirmative.

The worst part of BM47 isn't the harm it does to schools and local governments. The worst part of BM47 is that a registered voter doesn't even have to send in a ballot to be counted as a "no" vote on any tax question.

Ballot Measure 50 doesn't change that provision.

Though voters who opposed BM47 may be reluctant to approve Measure 50 because such a vote could indicate approval of BM47, there are reasons to vote for Measure 50.

Measure 50 reduces taxes in an amount that should be pleasing to taxpayers, though not quite as much at BM47. The difference, though, will allow local governments and schools to budget more sensibly.

If Measure 50 is defeated, the inconsistencies resulting from the poorly written BM47, will leave those agencies nearly hog-tied by the court cases that surely will require judicial definition. So, if you don't want your law written by judges, vote yes for Measure 50.

Another problem with BM47 is that it leaves no room for cities and schools to plan for growth. The three-percent cap on property taxes remains with Measure 50, too, creating a problem for schools or cities growing at a rate of six or seven-percent per year.

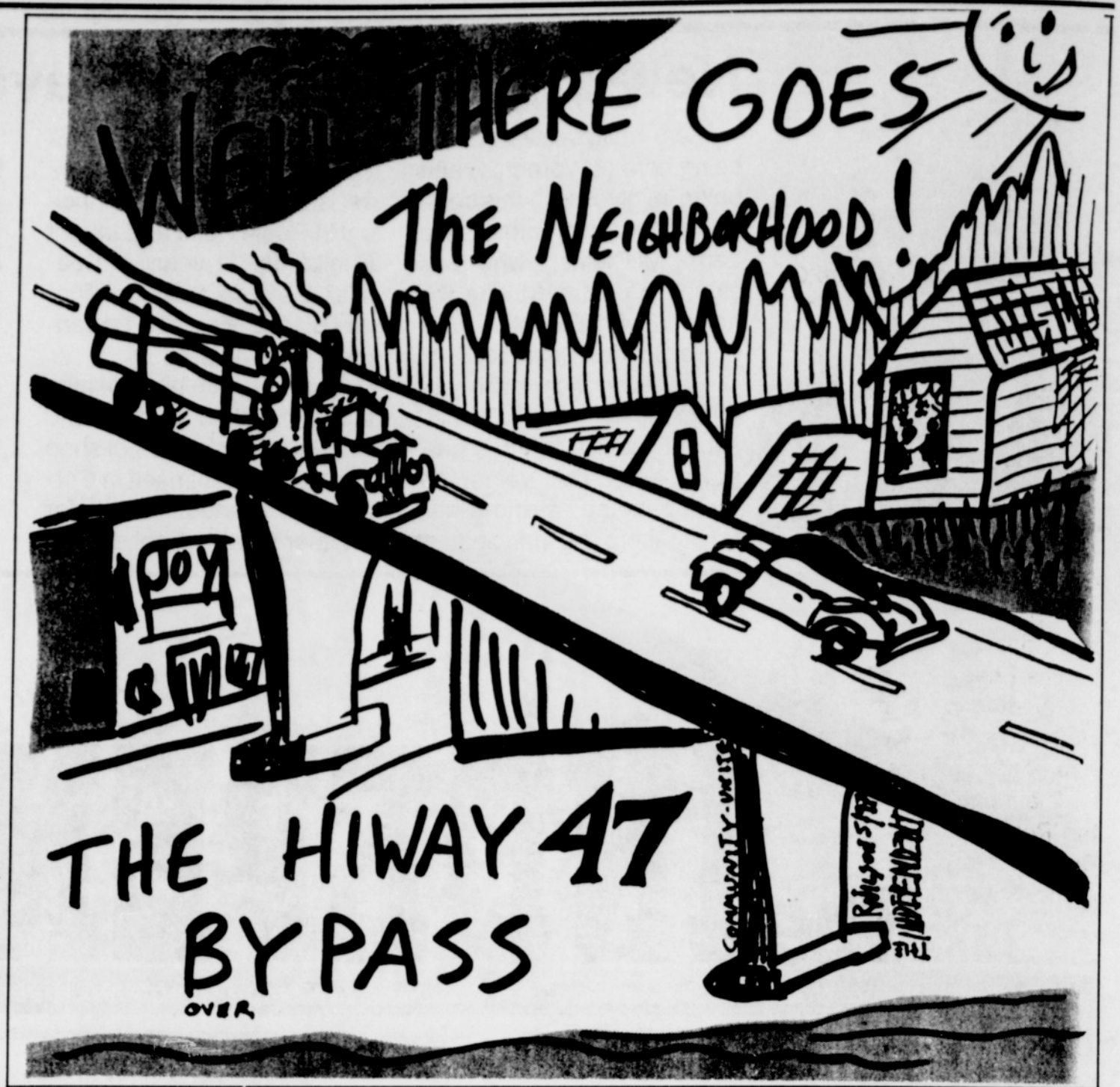
The difference, again, lies in interpretation. If Attorney General Hardy Myers' interpretation of BM47 is correct, it will end up providing very little property tax relief. Measure 50 simply is crafted better and shouldn't create so many ambiguities.

It's better to have a clearly written ballot measure, even if you don't care for all of its elements, than to buy into a carelessly crafted mish-mash that will be tied up in court forever.

A "Yes" vote on Measure 50 will make local budgeting more sensible because it's understandable.

Mere parsimony is not economy. Expense, and great expense, may be an essential part of true economy.

Edmund Burke
Letter to a Noble Lord, 1796



The Josi Report

By Rep. Tim Josi
Oregon Representative, District 2

When people visit the capitol, I often tell them the hardest part of my job is deciding which way to vote on certain issues. A vote may help some people while hurting others. I was faced with just such a dilemma last week.

For the past two years, the Oregon trucking industry has been developing a proposal to move away from their current taxing methodology which is used for highway maintenance and expansion. Oregon, as with four other states, currently utilizes a weight-mile formula for trucks traveling Oregon's highways instead of a diesel tax. Trucks pay a fee for the number of miles driven in Oregon which increases with the weight of their freight. The bookkeeping associated with weight-mile taxes is expensive for both the trucking industry and the state. However, it is recognized nationwide as the fairest method for allocating costs associated with road damage. Heavier trucks cause more damage to highways than lighter trucks and the weight-mile tax reflects that. Evasion of the weight-mile tax has always been a problem but the level has been disputed. The Oregon trucking industry believes evasion may be as high as 25 percent however, the Oregon Department of Transportation believes the level is closer to seven percent.

The trucking industry would like to move Oregon into alignment with most other states by switching to a diesel tax. However, cost responsibility would be marginalized because all trucks would pay the same tax regardless of their weight. To compensate for this inequity, the trucking industry proposed a variable vehicle registration and access fee based upon truck weights and vehicle usages. An example would be cement trucks, which would pay less because they burn about half of their fuel at the job site, pumping cement.

There are a number of problems associated with a move to diesel fuel taxation:

- A national study indicates that evasion may be as high as 30 percent. However, the trucking industry testified that new federal

laws – coupled with the requirement of taxes being collected at major distribution centers – eliminates much of the potential for evasion.

- Washington and California would have a lower diesel tax due to a broader taxing system. Newer, more fuel efficient, interstate trucks have the capacity to drive completely through Oregon without buying fuel here. A federal weight-mile tax system would help to compensate for the damage these trucks cause to our highways but some Oregon businesses, such as truck stops, would be hurt.

- According to information supplied by ODOT there would be a cost shift within the trucking industry. The heavier trucks would pay less (28-35 percent) and the cost shift would be picked up by the lighter trucks more closely associated with rural Oregon.

- There could be a substantial shift, in cost responsibility, away from the trucking industry. Nationally recognized data indicates the damage to our highways is split at 60 percent for cars and 40 percent for trucks. Oregon's current weight-mile system contributes 38 percent of the funds generated to fix roads and comes the closest in the nation at achieving cost responsibility. For this reason, the Oregon trucking industry believes they are at a competitive disadvantage with truck companies in other states.

The latest proposal, presented by the trucking industry, came close to representing true cost responsibility. However, I believe the figures need further scrutiny. I, along with one other democrat and two republicans, voted no to their proposal in the seven-member House Transportation Committee. The trucking industry still has three more chances, in other committees, to make their case and further refine their proposal.

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