



EDITORIAL

## Just one initiative worthy of support

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### **Please pardon our cynicism in advance, but we long ago lost confidence in Oregon's initiative system to deliver well-designed or even well-intended laws for this state.**

This state's initiative process — with very rare exception — is no longer a grassroots movement that gives ordinary citizens the ability to bring about changes too difficult for the Legislature to handle. In the past two decades, the initiative system has been taken over by big money or by professional initiators who make a living from proposing ballot measures and raising money to support those measures.

The eight "citizen" initiatives on the November 2008 ballot only serve to deepen our distrust of a system gone awry. Of those eight initiatives, just one is brought to the ballot by someone other than serial petitioners Bill Sizemore or Kevin Mannix. And that particular measure — the open primary initiative — happens to be the one worthy of voter support.

Sizemore's five measures, by contrast, are mostly extensions of his previous efforts to hamstring public employee unions or give tax breaks to the affluent. And Mannix's measures, while they at least address legitimate public issues, are bankrolled primarily by out-of-state interests.

Following is a recap of three of the initiatives on the November ballot, and our view of each. In a future issue of *The Outlook*, we will recap the other five initiatives, plus four other measures referred to the ballot by the Oregon Legislature.

#### **Measure 58 — English language learners:**

This measure, sponsored by Sizemore, would seem to be an attack on illegal immigration and therefore stands a reasonable chance of passing. But what the measure actually would do is limit the ability of non-English-speaking children to do well in school.

Sizemore is exploiting a common misunderstanding about how children whose first language is not English are taught in Oregon's public schools. The measure prohibits teaching public school students in a language other than English for more than two years.

That stated objective may have a surface appeal, but here's the reality: Nearly all (more than 85 percent) of Oregon's immigrant students already are taught in English. What Sizemore's measure would do is complicate a system that's working to move children from their native tongue to English as quickly as possible. He would segregate these children into English-immersion classes and then cut off any additional help after two years.

Plus, the measure will cost the state up to \$250 million at a time when it is likely to be short of money anyway.

#### **Measure 59 — Full deductibility of federal taxes:**

This is a repeat attempt from Sizemore to allow Oregon taxpayers to deduct more of their federal taxes from their state income taxes. There are two problems with this idea: Only about 25 percent of Oregonians would save any money from this change. But the measure would cost the state more than \$1 billion in the coming biennium.

That money would have to come from schools, prisons and social services. Meanwhile, the main beneficiaries would be people making more than \$200,000 per year. If most Oregonians take time to study the ramifications of this measure and understand how it affects them personally, they will vote no.

#### **Measure 60 — Pay teachers by performance:**

Another Sizemore initiative, Measure 60 offers a vague requirement that teacher pay raises must be based on “classroom performance,” not seniority.

The measure doesn’t say how performance will be graded, but the assumption is that it will be through standardized testing of students in all classrooms. If that’s the case, teachers in affluent areas will get raises and teachers who choose to work in more challenging districts — where test scores lag — will be deemed failures.

If you want to give all the teachers in Lake Oswego a raise, this is your measure. If you care more about Reynolds, Centennial and Gresham-Barlow, you’ll want to take a much closer look.

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