



Tax Measures Need Our Votes

by Cate Wollam

Well, our big winter party is over and it was a great success. We said good-bye to our dear sister Nancy Bergeson with memories and a toast, a good-bye she would have appreciated. (For a memorial to her

and to another member, Charles Simmons, who passed away recently, please see pages 16–18.) We welcomed pioneer Barbara Babcock (whose book is coming, maybe by next summer) and listened to her speech about another pioneer woman lawyer, Clara Foltz, and her Oregon connection. We ate and drank and visited and raised money for our lobbying efforts, and ate and drank and visited.

On January 26 we will vote on tax measures 66 and 67. I encourage all of you to go to Ballotpedia (Google Ballotpedia, Oregon measures 66 and 67), and check out the full text and arguments pro and con. A Measure 66 “Yes” vote raises the tax rate by 1.8 percent on incomes above \$250,000 for households, \$125,000 for individual filers, 2 percent on any amount above \$500,000 for households. For individual filers, the rate increases begin at \$125,000 and \$250,000 respectively. It also eliminates income taxes on the first \$2,400 of unemployment benefits received in 2009 (which is a great boon for folks during this recession). The vast majority of Oregonians, and our members, will be unaffected by these proposed changes.

The minimum corporate tax hasn’t been updated since 1931 and would *still be the lowest on the Pacific coast* if Measure 67 is approved. The measure also raises the tax on corporate profits—on what is left after deductions—by 1.3 percent. Currently two-thirds of the corporations doing business in Oregon pay that minimum \$10. I wish I could pay a \$10 minimum tax. What if two-thirds of all taxpayers, not just corporations, could get away with only paying \$10? It boggles the mind.

These numbers are miniscule to those who would have to pay them but huge to our budget. Without these measures we will again be looking at such draconian possibilities as closing courts one

day per week (or more), never mind the impact on schools. On the bright side for our clients, we may have to look at closing prisons. House Bill 3508 may be just the beginning of letting folks out sooner than the prosecution intended.

The latest poll I’ve seen says these measures are going down, but there are enough undecided voters to take them either way. Conventional wisdom is that because this is an odd time for an election there will be fewer voters, and lower voter turn-out has tended to favor the “No” votes in tax measures. We have an opportunity here to influence the election based solely on how many of us there are. If we all vote and encourage all of our friends and family members to vote we can make a difference.

Which takes me to a pet peeve: In 1976 when I started law school, we had three prisons in Oregon, OSP, OSCI and OWCC. According to the Oregon Prison’s web site we now have 14. I do not believe that serious crime has increased nearly five-fold in the past thirty-something years. We have five percent of the world’s population and twenty-five percent of the world’s prison population. I have a similar disbelief about babies that come out of an American woman’s belly being five times more likely to be a crook than babies born anywhere else. So, what are we doing differently than everyone else in the world? And why? ♦

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