



Ballot Recommendations

for the June 8, 2010

Statewide Primary Election

The five propositions on the June, 2010 ballot cover a wide range of issues. For once, our elections are not about raising funds through bond acts, but this is a test of what we value about our democracy. We have two propositions, Propositions 14 and 15, calling for changes in the way we elect officials, and they have potentially far-reaching implications for our future election processes. We have two others, 16 and 17, that are something of a test for our willingness to accept or question corporate campaign finances behind our election issues. Only Proposition 13 – the 2010 Proposition 13 – is reasonably uncomplicated. California Council of Churches IMPACT has deliberated on all of the issues and offers our recommendations below.

SUMMARY.

Proposition 13: **YES**
Proposition 14: **NO**
Proposition 15: **YES**
Proposition 16: **NO**
Proposition 17: **NO**

PROPOSITION 13.

Limits On Property Tax Assessment, Seismic Retrofitting Of Existing Buildings, Legislative Constitutional Amendment.

IMPACT Recommendation: SUPPORT.

Under current assessment standards, certain buildings that have been reinforced for earthquake protection are taxed differently from others that also have been reinforced using different methods and from those not yet reinforced. This corrective measure assures that building owners who have taken responsible retrofit measures will not be penalized with higher property assessments. There is no opposition to this proposition, and passing it assures uniform assessments and fair tax payments.

PROPOSITION 14.

Elections. Increases Right To Participate In Primary Elections.

IMPACT Recommendation: OPPOSE.

On the face of it, this proposition appears to create “open” primaries where all voters may participate. The top two vote getters, regardless of party affiliation, would move to the General Election. Supporters claim that partisan gridlock is what delays budgets and the Legislature’s ability to govern, but the real reason — demands for supermajority votes on both budget and revenues — is the real culprit. “Open primaries” sound good with assertions that all candidates would have to appeal to all voters, but several outcomes are likely. First, such “appeal” could result in lack of clear principles and generate pointless mediocrity with “Mom, flag, and apple pie” sorts of sentiments. Second, because candidates may obscure their party affiliation, voters would have no guidelines by which to ascertain any candidate’s true platform. Voters could easily be left with two Republican or two Democratic choices in the general election with no alternative. Partisanship as a function of obstruction is an issue, but lack of party clarity deprives voters of real information. It also opens the door to extremists who mask their real views with deceptive language and slogans. Proponents say past party registration would be revealed by other candidates, but what if there has been none?

We already have some party cross-over voting and voting by ‘decline-to-state’ voters in primary elections. Lack of party designation does not guarantee any greater choice. Third parties would be effectively eliminated since they would no longer have a way to verify the legal minimum vote percentage to exist as parties, and write-in candidates would be banned thereby eliminating a significant alternative to the top two vote getters in the General Election. It appears likely that by hiding party inclinations, candidates would become more rather than less deceptive, and corporate and other monetary interests would be inclined to even greater support for “stealth” candidates. We can see no real benefit to Proposition 14 but can project some serious damage to our electoral system. It will not fix what is wrong with California. It could easily make things worse.

PROPOSITION 15.

California Fair Elections Act.

IMPACT Recommendation: SUPPORT.

Californians have long opposed the excessive intrusion of often-hidden special interest financing in this state’s elections. January 21, 2010 the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Citizens United v The Federal Elections Commission* that limits on large organizations’ campaign contributions were unconstitutional. This ruling opens the floodgate to corporate, union, and other large-scale donations.

Proposition 15 seeks to halt the infusion of special interest money through a “clean election” fund for candidates for the office of Secretary of State. This office oversees the state’s elections and therefore must be especially free of outside influence. Candidates would voluntarily accept public funding, would draw all their campaign finance from this fund save for the \$5000 they would raise from citizens to qualify as a serious candidate, would split the fund equally among candidates, and would be prohibited from raising funds beyond the public financing.

The fund, nearly \$6 million per year, would not involve taxpayer money but would be raised through an increase in the annual registration fee for lobbyists who are given extraordinary access to legislators on behalf of their employers or clients. The fee would go from \$25 every two years to \$700. This is consistent with fees on lobbyists in several other states and is lower than licensing certification fees for many professionals. This fee would affect California Church IMPACT’s lobbyist as well as all others. We believe this is a fair way to create a pool of money for public financing of campaigns for this critically-important office.

With public funding, the successful candidate for California Secretary of State will be beholden to only the citizens of this state, not to special interests. That is a good step for democracy.



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PROPOSITION 16.

Imposes New Two-Thirds Voter Approval Requirement For Local Public Electricity Providers. Initiative Constitutional Amendment.

IMPACT Recommendation: OPPOSE.

This new constitutional amendment would require a supermajority public vote before a public utility could expand services. Who is funding this proposition is important since it is backed almost entirely by the for-profit private investor-owned utility (IOU), PG&E. This proposition seeks to limit competition to PG&E and other IOUs by curtailing the ability of city power departments or municipally-owned utilities to expand services that are less expensive or, as with “green power” generators, offer new additions to the market via direct service contracts at rates lower than IOUs can or will offer.

Investor-owned utility corporations have no such restrictions. They will be free to increase monopoly control over services and new energy sources since they would not have to wait for a vote on every expansion plan. By securing their absolute control over all customers, IOUs can argue for higher rates and reduced services to their customers.

Ballot arguments on behalf of this proposition assert that municipal utilities use “taxpayer money” for their expansion and growth. This distorts the reality that voters elect the board members of these municipal districts, that these utilities are already totally accountable to the public, and that they operate in the public interest. Investor owned utilities exist to make profits for banks, corporations, and individuals without regard to what is best for the common good. Proposition 16 is simply a way of assuring that for-profit utilities will never have significant competition from publicly-owned utilities, and that will be at the consumer and rate-payer’s expense.

Spread the Word!

We encourage members and friends to distribute these ballot guides from now until the election through “IMPACT Sundays.” Share them with members of your own congregation plus other churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, and temples and any other places of worship. Please ask for permission first if you are distributing inside any place of worship or feel free to stand outside to distribute them. We thank you for your interest in encouraging active deliberation on these and all issues that affect our democratic process and our moral perspectives as people of faith. If you find these recommendations helpful, please help defray the considerable cost with a contribution to California Council of Churches IMPACT.

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