

Measure 64: No Badly worded initiative could hurt charities

Published: September 29, 2008

Register Guard

Line up the clichés for Measure 64, the latest ballot bomb in Bill Sizemore’s ongoing war with Oregon’s public employee unions.

It will feel like *deja vu* all over again for Oregon voters, who have seen similar Sizemore measures in 1998 and 2000.

What part of “no” does Sizemore not understand? Oregonians wisely defeated both of those nearly identical earlier initiatives, though the votes were close in each election.

Will the third time be the charm for Sizemore? Let’s hope not. This measure is another classic Sizemore booby trap, riddled with ambiguity and unintended consequences that could blow up donations to charitable organizations. It deserves to be roundly rejected, though no one is under any illusion that Sizemore is daunted by defeat.

Measure 64 would prohibit any “public resource” from being used to collect or help collect money used for a political purpose, “except for resources used or spent preparing, printing or distributing an official voters pamphlet or conducting an election.” Basically, this would end the practice of allowing public employee unions to raise money for political activities through members’ payroll deductions.

Sizemore insists he’s just fighting for the principle that government should always be neutral in elections. That neutrality is compromised, Sizemore says, if the government is involved in collecting money that is spent advocating for union-supported candidates or ballot measures.

But payroll deduction is nothing more than a mechanical accounting function offered as a convenience for employees. It allows money to be deposited in bank accounts, donated to charitable organizations or sent directly to creditors to pay bills. It isn’t an indication of support for a political cause or an endorsement of a specific charity.

Furthermore, Sizemore has targeted voluntary employee contributions over and above union dues, which aren’t affected by the measure. Government workers can opt out of having the political contributions deducted from their paychecks.

The sloppy wording of the measure could also restrict some charitable fundraising, which is why United Way and other charitable organizations, such as the Oregon Food Bank and Oregon Humane Society, oppose the measure. If they engage in their normal political advocacy for their constituents, these nonprofits believe they could lose the ability to

raise money through payroll deductions from government employees and from the Oregon Charitable Check-off program.

Unfortunately, even if Sizemore loses at the polls, he forces his opponents to raise and spend millions to defeat his measures. He spends a pittance and is bankrolled by out-of-state ideologues such as Loren Parks. So far, the Defend Oregon coalition that is opposing Measure 64 and four other Sizemore measures on this year's ballot has raised more than \$2.5 million to Sizemore's \$50,000.

It's money that could be better spent on countless other worthy causes, such as United Way or the Oregon Food Bank. Maybe someday voters will stop signing Sizemore's destructive initiative petitions. In the meantime, they should add Measure 64 to his string of election defeats.