

“Open Primary” Designed to Open Your Wallet **by Jon Coupal, Howard Jarvis Taxpayer’s Association**

Taxpayers, hang onto your wallets. The latest threat to your hard earned dollars is a ballot measure with the innocuous title of “Elections: open primaries.”

The stated intent of the authors of the “open primary” – now designated for the June ballot as Proposition 14 – is to force the election of more “moderates,” meaning those willing to “compromise” on the passing of a budget or the enactment of new state taxes. Currently, both actions require a two-thirds vote of each house. Proposition 14 was approved for the ballot by the Legislature as part of a deal with Republican Senator Abel Maldonado to secure his vote for last year’s tax increase, which, not coincidentally, gave Californians the largest tax hike in the history of all 50 states.

In fact, Proposition 14 does not “open” a primary; instead, it eliminates the primary-general election system as we know it. The measure would close the general election to all candidates other than the top-two voter getters in the first election. This means that in many districts, voters can be faced with a final choice between two Democrats or between two Republicans, and candidates from smaller parties would be eliminated.

Although the loss of small party candidates could make elections less interesting and informative, it is another aspect of Proposition 14 that puts the taxpayer’s wallet in serious jeopardy.

Here is how, under Proposition 14, the system could be manipulated to elect more candidates likely to vote for “compromise” tax increases. If Proposition 14 is approved, it is highly unlikely that a fiscally conservative or anti-tax candidate will be voted in first or second place in districts within regions with long histories of supporting higher taxes such as San Francisco and Los Angeles.

In more conservative areas, however, the opposite is not necessarily the case. For example, in Orange County, government employee unions – the most powerful political force in the state – could easily mobilize behind a Republican candidate that has a pro-union record and who they believe would vote for a tax increase.

With ample funds for mailers to Democrats and union households identifying who “their” candidate is, and with other mailers to GOP homes upholding the same candidate’s Republican bonafides, it is simple to see how the system could be rigged to weed out fiscally conservative office seekers.

Supporters of tax and budget sanity, however, do not have the same funding and messaging apparatus as the government employee unions and would be unlikely to implement the same tactics in San Francisco or Los Angeles. So while Proposition 14 could result in electing a slightly more moderate candidate in these areas, the chances that that candidate would be a strong fiscal conservative opposed to new taxes is small.

Unfortunately, Proposition 14 would only worsen the real problem, which is pro-tax group-think on the budget and taxes that permeates most of Sacramento. Rather than confront the fact that our state spends more than taxpayers can provide, the legislative leadership prefers to simply continue to increase taxes, play budgetary tricks, declare the budget “balanced” and then kick the problem down the road to future leaders and taxpayers – while crossing their fingers that the economy will recover despite the debilitating tax increase they have imposed. These same rogues are counting on Proposition 14 to bring in legislative reinforcements so they can continue to play what Howard Jarvis used to call the “tax, tax, tax, spend, spend, spend, elect, elect, elect” game at taxpayers’ expense.

Taxpayer opposition to Proposition 14 has been called “alarmist” by the usual “goo-goo” crowd. (Meaning those interests which have deluded themselves into thinking that what they promote is “good government.”) However, when one considers that, in the near term Prop 14’s biggest beneficiary would be Abel Maldonado himself, taxpayers have more than enough reason to be alarmed.

John Coupal is President of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association – California’s largest grass-roots taxpayer organization dedicated to the protection of Proposition 13 and the advancement of taxpayers’ rights. Reprinted with permission.