

## ***California Primary Propositions (Feb 2008)<sup>1</sup>***

The vast majority of the election hype currently relates to Presidential candidate primaries and caucuses around the nation- leading up to “Super-Tuesday” in February. Something easy to overlook is that we will also be voting on seven Propositions. Four of these are virtually identical Referendums relating to Indian Gaming (gambling), while two Initiatives deal with State funding issues, and one wants to change current legislative term limits.

Because of its particularly clever deceptiveness, Prop 93 should be studied very carefully. In 1990 California voters approved lifetime term limits for serving in the Assembly (maximum 3 terms, 6 years total) and the State Senate (maximum 2 terms, 8 years total). As a result, the most anyone can serve in the legislature is 14 years. Prop 93 claims to reform term limits by limiting total time of service to 12 years (any combination of Assembly and State Senate service). However, because of a key provision, it would allow those who would have termed out this year (completing 14 years in office) to serve from 4 to 6 years longer. With 42 incumbent politicians falling into this category – the passage of Prop 93 would ensure the current dysfunctional legislative majority would continue to create offensive laws with little opportunity for a change until after the next gubernatorial election. Touting something as reform in order to maintain power and the status quo deserves to be rejected as the sham it is.

Relative to the four gambling Propositions (94, 95, 96, 97), I have little confidence of any benefit coming from these except to feed a broken State government that is fiscally irresponsible with the revenue it currently “manages”. These Propositions would grant a substantial increase in slot machines on four Indian reservations and place significant revenue in the State General Fund, not the Special Distribution Fund (SDF). The SDF was set up to assist people with gambling problems, pay for tribal casino regulators and inspections, provide grants to local governments whose services are affected by tribal gambling, and subsidize the other 71 federally recognized Indian tribes in California that have no (or only a small) casino.

If you like Props 94 through 97, let me ask a few questions. Is it the role of government (Rom 13:1-6; Isa 5:20-21) to encourage, incentivize, and benefit from an industry that all objective research clearly shows is not harmless entertainment, but creates significant societal problems: gambling addiction; debt; broken homes; higher rates of suicide and crime? The State Lotto promised to provide supplemental funds for public schools – but that revenue ended up replacing funds normally budgeted. If our legislature and Governor are incapable of exercising fiscal responsibility with Lotto funds, what confidence do we have that additional cash from casinos won’t be squandered? If the SDF is de-funded, who shoulders the responsibility to correct the adverse social, environmental, and public service consequences from gambling? If special deals are cut for four

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Indian tribes, on what basis will it be denied to the State's other 71 tribes? For that matter, on what basis would there be any limit on gambling in California? Make no mistake; greed is the fundamental motivation behind the gambling industry. Whether its out-of-state gambling interests backing Indian casinos, or Indian tribes playing to societal weaknesses through legal but destructive get-rich-quick allusions (Prov 12:11), or the individual who thinks they'll beat the odds and win big (Matt 6:24; Prov 20:21), or the State taking quick cash at the expense of longer term societal decay – it's driven and motivated by greed, not the best interests of the public. I believe the promotion of gambling costs us too much. I prefer greater restrictions and regulations, rather than more destroyed lives.

In 2002 Prop 42 passed overwhelmingly to ensure gasoline taxes are used for transportation purposes – except during a fiscal emergency. Prop 1A, passed in 2006 made the “fiscal crisis” loophole used by the legislature and Governor to raid transportation funds more difficult to use. Prop 91 was qualifying for the ballot when Prop 1A was passed, and since they are similar, the originators say it's no longer needed. This may be true, but Prop 91 restricts even more the ability of the State to borrow transportation funds, and requires payback within the budget year. I think the will of the people is clear: use gasoline taxes for transportation purposes only. I think Prop 91 sends the right message again, and limits even more the ability of our leaders to misappropriate funds.

Finally, Prop 92 is a complicated initiative that appears to benefit students by specifying lower Community College fees per unit. By restricting this revenue source, costs must be borne through other means than students paying their own way (already some of the lowest unit costs in the nation). To me, that means additional taxes or reapportionment of discretionary funds. Since I prefer to allow fees to float according to the need, I reject this very complicated Proposition.

Bottom line; I'm voting for Prop 91 and against Props 92 – 97.

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