

November 7, 2002

## REVIEW & OUTLOOK

### Common Sense at the Polls

A lot of liberal illusions were put to a direct popular vote in state initiatives yesterday, and most went up in smoke. On drug policy, taxes, health care or election reform, voters tended to favor common sense and fiscal restraint.

Those who would weaken laws against illegal drugs saw their previous ballot success end abruptly. In Ohio, voters rejected a measure to require treatment instead of incarceration for drug offenders. Anything-goes Nevada voted against marijuana legalization, and South Dakota rejected pot for industrial purposes. Libertarian Arizona rejected marijuana for medical use, which in practice has become a loophole for legalization.

A wave of good sense hit even San Francisco, where voters easily passed a "care not cash" initiative that will slash welfare checks to the homeless and shift the money to programs to rehabilitate them. The city's voters also joined the real world in rejecting moves to create a government electricity authority and raise property taxes. To the north, Oregon voters rejected by four-to-one an effort to force socialized medicine on the state. Oregon's good liberals also voted by 72% against another European idea -- requiring the labeling of genetically modified foods.

Tax issues loomed smaller than normal, but once again voters were more hostile to taxes than are the politicians they elect. Two measures to raise sales taxes for transportation failed in Virginia despite support from politicians of both parties. Voters in Washington state rejected a gas tax increase and reaffirmed their desire to roll back car license fees to \$30 a year. An amazing 46% of voters in the state formerly known as Taxachusetts voted to *abolish* the income tax, a clear message for GOP Governor-elect Mitt Romney.

In the wake of the Florida 2000 recount, several liberal groups promoted measures ostensibly to make voting easier but which would have increased the chances someone could commit voter fraud. All were routed. California and Colorado rejected plans to allow Election Day registration and voting. Colorado also refused to join Oregon in its shortsighted decision to move to abolish most polling places and conduct elections by mail. We note that as of yesterday, Oregon's glacial counting of mail-in ballots wasn't allowing it to call its tight governor's race.

Voters sent mixed signals on whether they want to limit the right of citizen initiatives. Oklahoma wisely rejected a measure to nearly double the signatures needed to put measures related to animal welfare on the ballot. However, Oregon and Montana approved measures that will make it slightly more difficult to qualify initiatives for future ballots.

There were other disappointments. Florida voters narrowly approved a budget-busting measure to limit school class sizes, despite the lack of evidence it's crucial in educational performance. A \$3 million ad blitz by a liberal Colorado heiress defeated Ron Unz's effort to end bilingual education. But an identical measure passed with 68% in Massachusetts, where pro and con spending was

more equal.

Despite a few disappointing results, the clear message sent through most of the measures on Tuesday's ballot was that personal responsibility matters and that government, like families, must live within budgets. Once again, voters demonstrated how direct democracy can be used to empower citizens when their elected officials choose to ignore their concerns.

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