

## **PROS & CONS - ORANGE COUNTY BALLOT INITIATIVES - NOVEMBER 8, 2005**

Patricia Harrigan

League of Women Voters, Orange County

For the Nov 8, 2005 election, there are 4 county initiatives on the ballot: B, C, D & E , all of which deal with the same topic in 4 different ways. At issue is the distribution of county government revenues received from the one-half cent sales tax approved by the voters in 1993 as Proposition 172, a constitutional amendment. Proposition 172 was intended to offset the impact on local revenues of a state mandated shift of local property taxes to the schools, known as ERAF (Education Revenue Augmentation Fund), which remains in effect.

The current situation is this: all counties and cities receive a share of the Proposition 172 money and it must be use for local public safety purposes specified as sheriffs, police, fire protection, county district attorneys, county corrections, and ocean lifeguards. The Board of Supervisors of each county has the authority to decide how the county's share is distributed. In Orange County, the money is allocated 80% to the Sheriff's department and 20% to the District Attorney.

Fire service is provided to unincorporated areas of the county and to 22 contract cities in the county by the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA), a joint powers authority formed in March, 1995; it is not part of county government. It is supported by property taxes, is not affected by the ERAF shift, and does not receive any Proposition 172 funds. A number of the board members of the Fire Authority and the firefighters union think the Authority should be getting some Proposition 172 money and that they need it.

### **MEASURE D**

Measure D was placed on the ballot as an initiative sponsored by the firefighters of the Orange County Fire Authority. It would shift a portion of the county's share of Proposition 172 revenues to the OC Fire Authority. Beginning with the 2005-06 fiscal year, funds would be shifted according to a formula included in the measure until the OCFA receives 10% of the Proposition 172 funds received by the county. Then OCFA share would then be capped at 10%.

Supporters say: that during the campaign for Proposition 172 voters were promised that a portion of the funds would go towards fire protection; that the Fire Authority is using old and outdated equipment that should be replaced; and that the funds would come from future growth in Proposition 172 revenues, and would not reduce current funding for law enforcement.

Opponents say: the Fire authority was not promised Proposition 172 funds; that the tax is paid by all Orange County residents and used for countywide public safety services, not for regional fire authority bureaucracies; that Measure D will reduce law enforcement services in every community in Orange County; that the Fire Authority has a substantial surplus and recently spent \$50 million to build an administration building.

### **MEASURE B**

Measure B Measure B was placed on the ballot by unanimous vote of the Board of Supervisors. It would provide that the Board of Supervisors could retain the current allocation of Proposition 172. Only public safety services provided by the county, specifically the County Probation Department, the County Sheriff-Coroner, the County District Attorney, and county lifeguards would be eligible to receive funds. The Board of Supervisors could not allocate funds to a safety service not listed in this measure.

Supporters say: that Measure B would protect county law enforcement funds from being raided; that law enforcement services are provided to all county residents, and that the Fire Authority only serves 43% of Orange county; that the Fire Authority is largely funded by property tax revenues, which are increasing because of rising real estate values in the county; that the number of fire and emergency response calls handled by the Fire Authority has declined significantly in the past decade, but its spending has increased, including for a \$50 million dollar headquarters.

Opponents say: the Proposition 172 ballot pamphlet argument in favor promised that part of the funds would go for fire protection; that measure B does not provide any funds for increased paramedic services or

fire protection and is only an excuse to let the Board of Supervisors break a promise made to the voters in 1993; that the Fire Authority is using 20 year old trucks, Vietnam-era helicopters and that half of the fire stations are understaffed because it has not received any Proposition 172 funds.

### **MEASURE C**

Measure C was placed on the ballot by unanimous vote of the Board of Supervisors. It would provide for the creation of a Homeland Security Infrastructure Fund in the county treasury; this fund would be required to be spent on capita projects and equipment to improve the county's homeland security by public safety service providers as specified in California law: sheriffs, police, fire protection, county district attorneys, county corrections and county life guards. No salaries or benefits would be paid from the Homeland Security Infrastructure Fund.

If the measure is adopted, beginning with the 2006-07 fiscal years, \$10 million of the county's share of Proposition 172 funds would be shifted to the Homeland Security Fund. Beginning in the 2009-2010 FY, this allocation would be adjusted annually to reflect changes in the county's share of Proposition 172 funds. The measure would establish a Homeland Security Infrastructure Oversight Committee that would consider proposals from eligible county public safety services providers each year and would make recommendations to the County for allocations from the Fund. The Fire Authority would be eligible to apply for grants.

Supporters say: Orange County must be prepared to cope with terrorist attacks. Measure C will create an Infrastructure Fund and will allow all eligible county public safety services in the county to submit proposals for capital projects and equipment to be funded from the Infrastructure Fund.

Opponents say: the measure does not guarantee that any money will be provided for increased fire protection; that it creates a new government bureaucracy whose only function is to make recommendations to the Supervisors and permits the Supervisors to continue breaking the promise made to California voters during the Proposition 172 campaign.

### **MEASURE E**

Measure E was placed on the ballot by unanimous vote of the Board of Supervisors. It would provide that beginning on January 1, 2006 and for each subsequent fiscal year, 5% of the County's Share of Proposition 172 funds will be shifted to the County Probation Department. The remaining County Share will be available for allocation to public safety services as specified in California law.

Supporters say: The Probation Department is crucial to combating crime in Orange County and protecting public safety; it currently does not receive any Proposition 172 funds and has had to discontinue supervision of some adult criminals due to lack of funds. 5% of Proposition 172 funds would make a big difference in giving the Probation Department the financial support it needs to do its job.

Opponents say: The issue is not between fire fighters and the valuable services provided by the Probation Dept, but about the Board of Supervisors honoring the promise of Proposition 172 that firefighters and paramedics receive a fair share of Proposition 172 funds.