



Upcoming special election has community divided

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By Rick Braatz

Local nonprofit representatives discussed the upcoming state budget propositions at a community forum at The San Diego LGBT Community Center, on Monday.

“[We want] to inform the LGBT community about the propositions that you will be voting on Tuesday, May 19. We’re hoping the information you garner will help inform your decision on the election or before then,” said Pride at Work, San Diego Chapter Co-chair Carlos Marquez.

Last February, the Legislature finalized the current budget agreement, which includes 37 percent in program cuts, 30 percent in new revenue, 19 percent in federal stimulus and 14 percent in borrowing. The agreement is dependent on voters passing upcoming Propositions 1A through 1F, which Marquez called a “house of cards.”

“The certainty of passing these propositions from day one has been [low]. Polls are reflecting that the propositions will fail, mostly because they’re confusing, but also voters aren’t happy with the fact that there is discussion about new taxes. There are also a lot of really wonderful programs that, if these propositions pass, will be raided to close the budget gap. That’s why I call it a house of cards,” Marquez said.

Center on Policy Initiatives Executive Director Donald Cohen equated the measures and upcoming special election to the novel, *Lord of the Flies*, about a group of British teenagers who are stuck on a deserted island and fight over its limited resources to survive.

“That’s what this election is about,” Cohen said, explaining that Proposition 13 is like the island in the novel.

According to Cohen, our state’s current budget problems and upcoming ballot propositions have their root in the 30-year-old Proposition 13, which placed a one percent-cap on state property taxes and requires a two-thirds majority to raise taxes.

“We went, in the early to mid ’70s, from a world-class higher education system, a world class K-12 system, a great fiscal infrastructure in the state of California to fighting over the crumbs of our economic decline,” Cohen said.

Cohen is against Proposition 1A, the so-called “rainy day” measure that would annually set aside three percent of the state’s general fund as a financial cushion during a deficit year. He also wants Proposition 13’s two-thirds majority requirement eliminated.

“When you have a third of the Legislature holding us hostage, it makes it hard to create the state we want. What we need is to get rid of minority ruling,” Cohen said.

“We want a California with fabulous schools, a great infrastructure that’s green and clean and healthy, a robust safety net program, so people in need can get help. Prop. 1A makes it

impossible. Minority ruling makes it impossible,” he added.

Besides Cohen and Marquez, who discussed the pros and cons of several measures, the nonprofit representatives stated and explained their position on one measure each.

San Diego Education Association President Camille Zombro will vote yes on Proposition 1A and 1B, which proposes to restore more than \$9 billion to public education.

“Here’s the deal with 1B. 1B is triggered by 1A. If 1A doesn’t pass, then there will be no money for 1B. Even if 1A is a wrong-headed solution, our schools still need to be funded,” she said.

According to Zombro, the state is legally required via Proposition 98 to give nearly 40 percent of its budget to public education. If Propositions 1A and 1B do not pass and public schools do not receive their allotted funds teacher associations and unions will file suit, Zombro said.

Unlike Propositions 1A and 1B, which impact the budget’s program cuts, Proposition 1C, the lottery measure, represents the amount the state would borrow.

“If the measure fails, we will see more programmatic cuts to the budget. But if the measure passes, the budget will yield a profit of \$5 billion, and it will update an antiquated system that we’ve needed to address for quite some time now,” Marquez said.

South Bay Community Services Communications Director Patti Chavez will vote no on Proposition 1D.

“The state is desperate for money but they’re going at it the wrong way; they’re looking at kids,” Chavez said.

Chavez thinks the proposition is a contradiction.

“In a nut shell, Prop. 1D says we’re going to cut funding for programs for children from 0 to 5 to give to programs for children 0 to 5,” Chavez said.

“What they’re saying is that it’s supposed to go to programs for 0 to 5, but in reality it’s going to the state general fund. So there’s no guarantee that it will go into children’s programs,” she said.

In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 10, which added a 50-cent tax to cigarettes to create First 5 California, a statewide children’s preventive program, which provides screenings to children 0 to 5 and home medical visits for first-time pregnant women.

Chavez works with the First 5 program.

“A lot of the children we see don’t have insurance. They are children that are coming from homes of domestic violence. They’re drug babies. They are children who are from at-risk families. If 1D passes, they will take away the services these children need, and there is no guarantee that the funding will come back,” Chavez said.

Dan McAllister, treasurer for Mental Health America of San Diego, will vote no on 1E.

“Proposition 1E deserves a no vote because it cuts mental health service by changing Prop. 63, which was created because the legislatures didn’t do their jobs in the first place,” McAllister said.

Historically, the state has short-changed mental-health programs, he said.

“That’s why Proposition 63 came about in the first place: to guarantee that there would be a stream of money moving into mental-health programs in perpetuity,” he added.

“If 1E passes, almost half a billion dollars from mental-health programs are likely to be taken away, just as these programs have had time to build up some momentum,” he said.

Before ending the discussion, Marquez commented on Proposition 1F, which would prohibit the state from giving lawmakers raises during deficit years.

“It’s like the populist argument, right? If they can’t do their job in the first place – and we are hemorrhaging money – then they shouldn’t be receiving a raise,” Marquez said.