



# PETE RATES THE PROPOSITIONS



June 1984

by Pete Stahl

## **PROPOSITION SIXTEEN -- yes**

Our county jails are overcrowded. They are designed to house about 31,000 people; last October they averaged 42,000. Overcrowded prisons are unhealthy, unsafe and cruel. I don't like having that on my conscience. You probably don't, either. So what can we do? Release pre-trial prisoners without bail, try work-furlough programs, use detoxification centers, release prisoners before their sentences are up. These are all being done. Yet the jail population continues to soar. The only alternative left is to make more room in the jails. California counties have asked for \$600,000,000 to expand and rennovate the county jails. Two years ago, we approved \$280,000,000. Prop 16 is an opportunity to add another \$250,000,000. We should jump at it.

## **PROPOSITION SEVENTEEN -- yes**

Our state prisons are overcrowded. They are designed to house about 25,700 people; this January they held 39,000. This problem is more severe than the county jail problem addressed by Prop 16 because 96% of the inmates in the state prisons are sentenced to terms of more than a year. I agree with you liberals that the ultimate answer may lie in shorter sentences, improved social programs, etcetera. But in this age of the Victims' Bill of Rights and "use a gun, go to prison" laws, shorter sentences are not a likelihood. Furthermore, judges have shown that they won't take prison conditions into account during sentencing. I refuse to subject California's prisoners to such inhumane conditions while we strive for an intellectual solution (which, if recent developments are any indication, is not going to come about soon). Prop 17 provides \$300,000,000 to relieve prison overcrowding. This is in addition to the \$495,000,000 approved in 1982, which simply was not enough.

Another, more serious objection to Prop 17 is that the passage of the long-term solution (i.e., building more prisons) will forestall or prevent enactment of the short-term solutions now being considered by the legislature. Once the money's been approved, legislators may forget overcrowding altogether, even though the first new prison won't be ready for many years. Sadly, this may happen, but voting no on Prop 17 is not the way to prevent it. To defeat a measure in vain hopes that something better will come along next time is naive and futile. You do not have the opportunity to vote "yes, with reservations" or "no, except for this part." You must take or leave Prop 17 as is. And it's a positive step.

## **PROPOSITION EIGHTEEN -- yes**

## **PROPOSITION NINETEEN -- yes**

California has traditionally funded park acquisition and development through the sale of bonds. Prop 18 is a \$370,000,000 bond for parks and recreational facilities; Prop 19 is an \$85,000,000 bond for fisheries and wildlife habitats. Included in these is \$50,000,000 for the State Coastal Conservancy, which has

been running on some pretty tight budgets lately. As our urban population grows, the need for parks, wilderness areas and a preserved coastline becomes more acute. Props 18 and 19 will fulfill this need for at least a few years.

**PROPOSITION TWENTY -- no**

Prop 20 is nice in theory. People who lie to get elected should be kicked out of office. Great. Now offer me a reasonable scenario wherein an elected official is removed under the provisions of Prop 20. First our lying legislator is tried and convicted of libel or slander. He appeals. He is convicted again. He appeals again. 50,000 people suddenly appear with in signed affidavits proclaiming that if they had known the liar's opponent wasn't a skinhead rapist from Mars, they would have voted for him. The liar appeals on the grounds that it cannot be ascertained that these 50,000 people voted for him in the first place. And on and on. Our liar's term of office has expired by now. A recall election would have been faster and cheaper! Sure, politicians who commit slander should be removed from office. So should politicians who break their campaign promises, or who lie about their age, or who claim that trees cause air pollution. Prop 20 will just cause a bunch of nuisance suits by disgruntled losers, none of which will ever result in anyone's removal from office.

**PROPOSITION TWENTY-ONE -- no**

Two years ago, I urged a no vote on Prop 6, which would have loosened the restrictions California places on investments made with public employees' pension funds. Prop 6 would have allowed 60% of a public pension fund to be invested in common stocks, and 5% to be invested in companies not meeting safety and reliability criteria. (5% of the major public retirement systems' assets currently amounts to two billion dollars.) Prop 21 seeks to remove ALL restrictions on public pension fund investments. That's right, all. Imagine watching helplessly as your retirement money goes up and down with the Dow-Jones average, or some Fortune 500 company, or even some tiny little company. Alarming, no? As I said in 1982, we're talking big-time speculation with pension funds. If you think the words "speculation" and "pension" shouldn't even appear in the same sentence, you'll help vote down Prop 21.

**PROPOSITION TWENTY-TWO -- yes**

Let's get some professionals in here to manage the public employees' pension funds! Right now, these managers are part of the Civil Service, which has strict hiring rules that give preference to those who aren't necessarily the most qualified (people with prior state experience, veterans, etc.). Prop 22 would remove the investment officers and fund managers of the Public Employees' and State Teachers' Retirement Systems from Civil Service, allowing the state to hire any people it chose. Similar exemptions from Civil Service currently apply to judicial commission members, professors in the state's universities, and members of the Attorney General's staff. Fund management is a job requiring extraordinary skills (ask the City Manager of San Jose if you don't believe me). Prop 22 will help California get the qualified investment specialists it needs.

**PROPOSITION TWENTY-THREE -- no**

Four California cities have enacted laws requiring commercial buildings made of unreinforced masonry to be reconstructed so as to be earthquake-safe. Prop 23 asks us whether to spare these building from reassessment (and a big jump in property taxes), which would normally occur due the the "new construction or improvements." Well, if this were for something simple, like installation

of fire sprinklers or a new coat of paint, I'd be all for it. But wall reconstruction is a fundamental change to a building. It increases a building's market value suddenly and substantially, even if it was done only to comply with a local ordinance. An increase in property taxes is appropriate here.

**PROPOSITION TWENTY-FOUR -- no**

The state legislature, like any deliberative body, adopts its own rules for efficiency and expediency. These rules govern such things as who makes committee appointments, the hiring of assistants and how to choose committee chairs. The rules currently in use by the legislature have served it well, without significant change, through both Republican and Democratic majorities. Prop 24 seeks to redistribute power within the legislature, while also reducing the legislature's funding by 30% and imposing partisan quotas on committee memberships. Prop 24 would also require two-thirds vote (rather than the current simple majority) to change the rules further.

Now, I really think the legislature is capable of managing itself quite well, thank you. If we don't trust the Assembly and Senate to run themselves, why did we elect them to run California? Prop 24 weakens the whole legislature with its 30% funding cut--research will be drastically reduced, leaving a dangerously uninformed bunch of lawmakers under the Dome. Prop 24 is touted as a boon to the Republican minority in Sacramento, but if it is, where is all the Republican support? Prop 24 is simply an unnecessary law. The current system works to the satisfaction of nearly everyone. The system may need some fine tuning, but this bill is ridiculous.