

Common Sense for California's Future

by Mitch Zak, Governor Schwarzenegger's Campaign Advisor

If you're pleased with California's elected representatives, chronic fiscal crises, and public schools, you needn't read any further. If you're not, there's something you can do: Use common sense when evaluating Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's reform agenda which appears as three initiatives on the November ballot (Propositions 74, 76 and 77).

When you consider if reforms are necessary and whether or not the people must act, consider the following questions:

* Would government ever spend responsibly and save money in good budget times for a "rainy day" unless it is forced to do so?

* Would you get responsive representation in government if politicians can choose their constituents?

* Would any enterprise have the most qualified people on the job if it must hire them "for life" after a relatively brief trial period?

If your answers to these questions are "No", you understand why Governor Schwarzenegger called a Special Election on November 8th. He is giving Californians a chance to take important first steps to reform and rebuild California. Here's how:

Proposition 76 would prevent another state fiscal crisis. It is based on the same principle that you must apply in your personal life: Plan to spend no more than you expect to earn, and save any windfall for those times when your income might be reduced. Specifically, this Live Within Our Means initiative provides that growth in government spending in any year may not exceed the average growth in the state tax revenues over the prior three years. In a year when spending under this restriction is less than the tax revenues, the excess must be saved. Conversely, during difficult times when tax revenues are less, those savings can be tapped to preserve essential programs. Reflecting public priorities, there are also provisions that secure investment in schools, police and fire protection and roads. Other provisions would enable the Governor to address budget deficits without a government shut down if the legislature refuses to act. Proposition 76 makes sense.

Proposition 77 would make legislative districts reflect the best interests of the people rather than the politicians. It would replace the current system of incumbent legislators creating their own districts to benefit them and their political parties with a system by which bipartisan retired judges draw the district boundaries based on good government principles. In addition, voters would be able to review and vote to approve the final boundaries. Taking the politicians' interests out of the reapportionment process will result in districts that require responsiveness by elected representatives. Proposition 77 also makes sense.

Proposition 74 would ensure more qualified teachers in our schools. Great teachers are essential to quality learning, and each of our schools must have the chance to recruit, select, and retain the best. Unfortunately, under current rules, a school must decide either to offer "permanent status" or fire a new teacher after only two years. In many cases, that isn't enough time to determine which teachers are really the best. The Put Kids First initiative provides that a teacher would have to demonstrate proficiency over a period of five years before getting tenure and would have to continue to perform satisfactorily to retain that status. Teachers would be protected by retaining all rights to collective bargaining and due process, but, in return, they must deliver for our children. Proposition 74 makes sense as well.

Sadly, you are already seeing and hearing paid advertising against these reforms, and it's intentionally deceptive. Opponents claim budget reform would slash needed spending, education reform would attack good teachers, and political reform is unnecessary. Californians will see through the phony arguments. They understand that we have problems and need to fix them.

While the Governor's reform agenda may not solve all the problems facing California, Propositions 74, 76 and 77 are crucial first steps. In the years ahead, we will need more common sense actions so California can realize its uncommon potential. Let's get stated on November 8th.

