

Just say no to Props 68 and 69

By Andrea Seastrand

May 25, 2018 01:55 PM

Updated May 26, 2018 04:29 PM

This June's election will bring more than just local races and primaries for state offices. Several ballot propositions offer voters some key choices. While the more high-profile ballot measures like the repeal of California's controversial gas tax hike and the Keep California Safe Act will appear in November, there are some important decisions coming before voters in the next few weeks.

One that deserves to be rejected is Proposition 68, the so-called Parks Bond put on the ballot by the Legislature on a near party-line vote. If passed, it will shell out \$4 billion on various projects that are somewhat related to parks and water quality but with a large portion earmarked for powerful environmental special interests and politicians' pet projects. Not only are the spending priorities outlined in the measure flawed, but it will add another brick in the wall of debt already overhanging California.

The non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office estimates that it will ultimately [cost taxpayers \\$7.8 billion](#) to pay off Proposition 68. Put another way, it will cost \$200 million over the next 40 years for this bond alone. While building parks and protecting the environment may sound like worthy causes, the important context to know is that voters have already approved \$148 billion in bonds over the past few decades and [\\$31 billion of this debt](#) still hasn't been issued. That is a staggering number. When finally borrowed by the state, it will take up a significant share of future budgets and crowd out essential public services like education and public safety.

Considering the amount of debt the state already has on the books, especially when unfunded pension liabilities are included, voters would be wise to just say no to the Parks Bond. Currently, California is projected to have a [\\$9 billion budget surplus](#). If any of the projects that will be financed by Proposition 68 are truly essential, the state should be using some of the surplus to prepay for them in order to save on interest and debt costs. Whenever the state issues bonds, the cost of financing debt usually doubles the cost. It's like a family charging large purchases on a high-interest credit card when their savings could pay for it instead.

State politicians love bonds because it's easy to pass along the costs to future generations. Instead of adding more debt, we should pay for parks with the extra money we have now. Proposition 68 deserves your no vote.

The other ballot measure brought forward by the Legislature that should be rejected is Proposition 69. Much like the Parks Bond, it's driven by Sacramento's insatiable appetite for higher taxes and spending. This proposition creates a constitutional "lockbox" that will supposedly protect last year's gas and car tax increases from being diverted to non-transportation purposes.

While this may sound assuring even to those who opposed raising the gas tax, the reality is that this ballot measure is all about creating a false sense of security for taxpayers. The gas tax increase was [incredibly unpopular with voters](#) who already felt the burden of some of the highest fuel costs in the nation. In order to help justify the tax hikes, Proposition 69 was conceived as a companion measure to make the public think that they could trust Sacramento this time and transportation funds would only go to their intended purposes.

This initiative comes after previous constitutional amendments to supposedly prevent diversion of transportation funds via Proposition 42 in 2002, Proposition 1A in 2006, and Proposition 22 from 2010. Despite these protections for transportation funds, [\\$1 billion per year in truck weight fees](#) were diverted to provide relief to the state's general fund. Why should voters expect that the false promise of Proposition 69 will be any different than those from the past?

Equally concerning is that Proposition 69 would allow politicians to get around the constitutional spending cap that voters approved in 1979 by [exempting the increased gas and car registration taxes](#) from being counted towards it. California's rapidly swelling budget over the past few years has pushed the state [closer and closer to its spending cap](#). We should not give Sacramento any more leeway to continue its rapid growth of state government.

We are fortunate that voters still have the ability to hold state lawmakers in check by requiring voter approval for bonds and constitutional

amendments. Voters should take this responsibility very seriously and say no to the Legislature's submitted ballot Propositions 68 and 69.

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