



SJR 23: a modest – and flawed – step for constitutional reform

Testimony for Senate Finance and Revenue – Bennett Minton – 3.20.2019

Tax Fairness Oregon applauds any measure that would make appropriate use of the kicker, an irrational, counterproductive constitutional provision. The kicker relies unrealistically on the forecasting abilities of state economists. More importantly, it exacerbates macroeconomic cycles to the detriment of Oregon.

The diversion of the kicker into a proposed “Personal Investment in Education Fund” is better policy than returning it to taxpayers. The value individuals may attach to their kicker tax credits is dwarfed by the harm to the state and its people during recessions.

We assume the intention of creating the education fund is to focus on the political priority of the moment. Various measures show that the quality of our schools has collapsed in the three decades since taxpayers began constricting your means of raising revenue.

Rather than tie its own hands, we would prefer that the legislature approve the broadest possible use of the revenue, and without specifying in the constitution how it should be spent. We assume the designation of the revenue for a narrow purpose is a play for votes – from legislators and citizens. But we know that priorities change.

TFO opposes subjecting any expenditure to a fundamentally undemocratic supermajority requirement. Creating additional 40-percent-plus-one stipulations within the Legislative Assembly would continue a practice in which a minority rules for a category of otherwise routine expenditures.

We understand the politics that have guided Oregon’s leaders since the 1990s. A number of citizens have submitted statements opposing SJR 23 for today’s hearing. But we suggest that recent trends, particularly the results of the 2018 elections, indicate that citizens recognize that they have enfeebled republican government, and that they are prepared for you to bear the responsibilities of office: to govern, with a simple majority, in the best interests of Oregonians – especially those too young to cast ballots.

We read the bills and follow the money