

EDITORIAL

The devil in Prop. 47's details

By MELISSA MELENDEZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As the dust settles from the recent election, it still surprises me that Proposition 47 passed with nearly 60 percent of the vote. Under the newly passed measure, thousands of convicted felons have already been released into our neighborhoods. Countless other criminals are being cited in the field and released on the spot.

Californians have a proven track record of being tough on crime. So how did Proposition 47 manage to pass with such a large margin?

This heinous mistake is borne from an utter lack of transparency from the liberal special interests that backed this measure. The backers of Prop. 47 hid the truth from voters and led them to believe that no harm would come from its passage. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Attorney General Kamala Harris officially supported Prop. 47, labeling it as a cost saving measure that will not result in the release of dangerous criminals. In addition to her support, the backers of the measure innocuously called themselves the "Californians for Safe Neighborhoods & Schools."

In actuality, this measure was paid for by the American Civil Liberties Union and other organizations that have spent decades making our communities less safe and even opposed California's groundbreaking Three-Strikes Law. Additionally, voters were told that the money saved would go towards local school truancy programs and drug rehabilitation services.

On the surface, this all seems fine. But, like most things in California politics, the devil is in the details.

After the passage of Prop. 47, possession of "date-rape drugs" is no longer considered a felony. As a mother of a young daughter, it horrifies me to think that it's now only a misdemeanor to possess date-rape drugs. While other penalty reductions in the measure are for crimes such as drug possession for personal use, a criminal carrying a date-rape drug has no intention of using that substance on themselves. Their intent is clear – to use the drug to incapacitate and harm unsuspecting victims.

Stealing a handgun is another crime that is no longer a felony, as long as the value of the weapon is under \$950. The Legislature spent the last several years passing countless regulations on gun owners. Now, with Prop. 47, stealing a gun is only a misdemeanor. I do not know any law-abiding gun owners that would steal a gun so they can go hunting or to add to their collection. It's clear that if someone steals a handgun, they plan to use it for malicious purposes.

Possession of highly addictive and dangerous drugs like meth, heroin and cocaine is also now considered a misdemeanor under Prop. 47. When voters went to the ballot box, they cast their vote for a provision they were told would simply give more lenient sentences to marijuana users and divert more money to drug rehab and truancy programs. Instead, what they got was a green light for hard street drugs, gun theft and the possession of date-rape drugs.

Adding insult to injury, the cost savings promised in Prop. 47 will be minimal and their effects will not be seen for years to come.

The California Boards of State and Community Corrections have admitted that there will be substantial lag time between the massive release of offenders and when the supposed savings will actually trickle down to the local level. Meanwhile, dangerous criminals are roaming our streets as we speak, and there is not one measure in place to confront this threat to public safety.

Last session, I served as the vice chair of the Public Safety Committee in the Assembly; I know that Californians are passionate about public safety. Californians will not stand for this once the dirty details are revealed.

That's why I recently joint-authored Assembly Bill 46 with Assemblyman Tom Lackey of Palmdale. Our bill will begin the process of reversing Prop. 47 by asking voters to reinstate the felony conviction for criminals who possess date-rape drugs.

It is not the voters' fault that they were misled about the hidden provisions in Prop. 47.

I'm fighting to give them a second chance to make their voices heard and reverse this dangerous measure.

Assemblywoman Melissa Melendez,
a Republican, represents
California Assembly District 6.

A step forward on public health

Childhood vaccinations, falling for years, rebound as medical consultation required.

These pages have long embraced one of the fundamental tenets of classical liberalism: that people ought generally to be left alone to live their lives as they see fit – no matter how bizarre some of their choices may be – as long as they do not harm anyone else in the process.

Occasionally, however, matters of personal discretion have public consequences – and those often prove to be some of the hardest cases for lawmakers to address equitably.

One such issue is childhood immunizations. In recent years, growing numbers of parents have been scared off of vaccinating their children, a development largely attributable to the (thoroughly discredited) notion that the process can cause autism.

While that fear is fictional, the dangers associated with foregoing vaccinations are all too real.

California law allows parents to exercise a right to "personal belief" that excuses their children from the vaccination requirement.

As anti-vaccine hysteria spread, however, the numbers rose dramatically. From the 2007-08 school year until last year, exemptions more than doubled. It's no coincidence that this period was marked by a resurgence

of whooping cough; there were more than 9,000 cases in the state in 2010, the most since 1947.

Responding to this issue presents tough choices. Making the vaccines absolutely compulsory would run roughshod over conscience protections (and overlook the fact that, in relatively infrequent cases, vaccines actually can cause health problems). Leaving the status quo unchecked, however, could needlessly jeopardize public health.

In response, state lawmakers came up with (and we don't get to say this often) an ingenious solution: They required parents wishing to exercise the "personal belief" exemption to first consult a doctor on the benefits and drawbacks of vaccinations. The result: this year, for the first time in a decade, vaccination rates are back on the rise.

This is a model example of where – and how – government regulation can work. We applaud lawmakers for having the judiciousness to neither stand pat nor engage in legislative overreach.

And we encourage California parents to devote the attention to this issue that it deserves. Public health – and children's welfare – is a serious concern. It ought to be informed by sound science and a sober weighing of the evidence, not by scaremongering.



BRUCE CHAMBERS, REGISTER PHOTO

In this Aug. 22, 2013 photo, Parkview Elementary sixth grader May Kabartay, 11, winces, left, as she gets an immunization shot from registered nurse Riva Apodaca, in preparation for the new school year.

GLENN MCCOY / UCLICK



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Riverside county a leader in mental health

With so many tragic stories of school shootings, burned-out social workers and maltreatment of the mentally ill, you have to wonder what can be done. Are these incidents preventable? Should we even care? The answer is yes. Mental illness has touched all of us at some point in our lives, whether through a family member, a friend, a neighbor or even personally. It's time to lift the taboo on mental illness and recognize that an expansion of early intervention services is needed.

As a result of state Senate Bill 82, the Investment in Mental Health Wellness Act of 2013, Riverside County has an opportunity to invest in mental health. This bill provides an opportunity for the

county to use Mental Health Services Act funds to expand programs focused on early intervention services aimed toward wellness and recovery and reducing taxpayer costs through a reduction in unnecessary hospitalizations.

As a Riverside County resident since birth and a mental health social worker, I am always on the lookout for local public policies that affect the mentally ill. It is no secret that the Riverside County Department of Mental Health has seen its share of controversies and negative public opinion.

But, let us, for a moment, put the bad and the ugly aside and recognize the good that the county has done for this vulnerable population. Without these services, the mentally ill would face bleak, if not impossible, circumstances.

I welcome any investment in programs that will benefit marginalized groups, but

let's face it, as taxpayers we also want to know that these programs will prevent our tax dollars from flooding through the system uncontrollably and wastefully. History has shown that early intervention programs, whether in health care, education or any other wellness-related area, when executed properly, really do have an impact on costs.

By way of collaboration between several entities, such as law enforcement, hospitals, nonprofits and neighboring counties, RCMHD is leading the way in building a strong network of services for the mentally ill that will also benefit the community as whole.

I am proud of the Department of Mental Health for launching this new program and continuing its efforts to be a strong support system for this population.

Janice Paramo
Riverside

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Published every morning at 3512 14th St., Riverside CA 92501-3876 and delivered by contractor in Riverside and San Bernardino counties

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE
USES RECYCLED NEWSPAPER | ISSN #0746-4258
VOL. 129 NO. 441

New trend in politics: back to the minors

When April rolls around and the 2015 Halos take the field at Angel Stadium, you can bet they'll be a diverse group with wildly different



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backgrounds. But there's one thing that almost all of them will have in common – they've reached the pinnacle of their career by working their way up the baseball food chain.

The story is always the same – first is little league,

then comes high school, college, the minors and finally the pros. You'll never find a major league baseball player who randomly decides to ditch the Yankees for the Mud Hens. It just doesn't happen.

The same used to be true for politics.

In politics, candidates used to start out by winning a spot on a school board, city council or county board of supervisors, and, if they achieved some degree of success, they could parlay that into a seat in the state legislature; or, if they're really lucky, the United States Congress.

In the old days, members of the state legislature or Congress would never consider leaving a seat in such a prestigious body to come home and listen to constituents complain about pot holes.

Well, times are changing.

In Los Angeles County, four of five members of the Board of Supervisors previously served in the state Legislature – Hilda Solis, Sheila Kuehl, Michael Antonovich and Mark Ridley-Thomas. Orange County currently features two former Sacramento lawmakers on its board – Patricia Bates and Todd Spitzer – with state Sen. Lou Correa currently running to replace state Senator-elect Janet Nguyen in the first district.

And finally, this November, San Bernardino County featured one of the state's costliest and nastiest elections to determine who would be the fourth district supervisor – this contest was between Assemblyman Curt Hagman, the eventual victor, and Congresswoman Gloria Negrete McLeod, a former state legislator.

This leads to the question, why are politicians willingly making this jump "back to the minors"?

First on the list is the huge disparity in salary. Contrary to what you may think, most Southern California boards of supervisors pay more than Sacramento. An L.A. County Supervisor makes \$179,000 a year; in Orange County, it's \$145,000; and, in San Bernardino County, the gig is worth \$151,971 annually.

Meanwhile, members of the California Legislature bring in \$95,291 a year and are required to maintain two residences, one in Sacramento and another in the district.

Regular air travel is also a pain for Sacramento legislators. California is a big state, and most of the population is in the south, meaning a trip to the state capitol for most legislators is a plane ride away – complete with TSA checkpoints, flight delays and lost luggage. If you're a county supervisor, you can make it to work in the comfort of your own car.

County governments are also designed to make legislating easy. Outside of San Francisco, each California county only has five members of the board – this means that you only need to cobble together three votes to win a legislative majority. Compare that with the state Assembly, which requires 41 votes for a majority, the state Senate, which requires 21, and Congress, which requires literally hundreds.

There's no doubt that getting things done is much easier at the county level.

Finally, legislative term limits have pushed politicians back to local government.

The theory behind term limits was to purge the Legislature of "career politicians" and replace them with "citizen politicians" who would go back to their local communities as lay people after a few terms in Sacramento.

The actual result is that many of them are indeed going home, but we're calling them "supervisor."

Staff opinion columnist John Phillips can be heard weekdays at noon on "Mid-Day LA" on KABC/AM 790 in Los Angeles.