

YES AND NO

Voters appear to want it all without wanting to pay for it.

BY JENNIE DRAGE BOWSER

Voters said yes to Republican candidates up and down the ballot on Nov. 2, but when it came to ballot measures seeking revenue increases the answer was a resounding no.

Economic worry was the overriding message from voters' verdict on the 160 statewide ballot measures. It was clear they are not willing to pay new taxes, though voters did give the OK to \$1.2 billion in statewide bond measures out of a total of \$1.9 billion on the ballot.

As if balancing state budgets isn't difficult enough in the current economic climate, voters passed a number of measures that will make the job even tougher in several statehouses. Voters approved tax cuts—except in Colorado and Massachusetts—but rejected every proposal to increase revenue. They made it more difficult for legislatures to pass tax increases and at the same time approved a handful of programs with high price tags and no way to fund them.

A MIXED BAG

There may have been fewer than usual citizen initiatives on ballots this year—42 compared to 59 two years ago and 76 in 2006—but that doesn't mean they won't make dramatic changes to state policy and fiscal situations.

Washington, which doesn't have an income tax, will find it harder than ever to balance the budget next year. Voters there rejected a new income tax on high wage-earners—\$200,000 for single filers and \$400,000 for joint filers—that could have raised as much as \$11.2 billion over the next five years. The money would have offset new cuts in property, business and occupations taxes, and helped pay for health and education programs.

Voters in Washington approved Initiative 1053, which requires the Legislature to pass all tax increases by at least a two-thirds vote,

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BALLOT MEASURES BY THE NUMBERS

160

Statewide measures on the ballot

113

Number that came from legislatures

71%

Legislative referenda approved

42

Initiatives on the ballot

43%

Initiatives approved

rather than a simple majority. Voters previously approved the two-thirds requirement through a 2007 initiative, but lawmakers temporarily suspended it earlier this year to increase taxes on soda, candy, bottled water and certain processed foods. But the anti-tax mood felt across the country was especially potent in Washington, and voters repealed those tax increases on Election Day as well, cutting \$352 million out of the state budget and \$83 million from local governments over the next five years. That's a double-whammy for the Pacific Northwest state.

California, which already has the two-thirds requirement for tax increases, now must meet the same threshold to raise regulatory fees. In separate actions, Californians rejected \$3.3 billion in potential revenue, including some from taxes on proposed legalized marijuana, and restricted the Legislature from taking funds meant for transportation and local government to help balance the state budget. One bit of good budget news out of the Golden State: Passage of Prop. 25 will allow the Legislature to pass the budget with a simple majority, rather than a two-thirds vote.

In Arizona, voters rejected a legislative

plan passed this fall to cancel early childhood health and land conservation programs and transfer the money to the general fund. The state's current budget deficit of \$825 million will swell to about \$1.3 billion as a result.

Successful ballot measures in other states also will strain budgets. Florida voters said no to easing the strict constitutional K-12 class-size limits, costing the state \$40 billion over the next 10 years, according to the nonpartisan Florida Tax Watch.

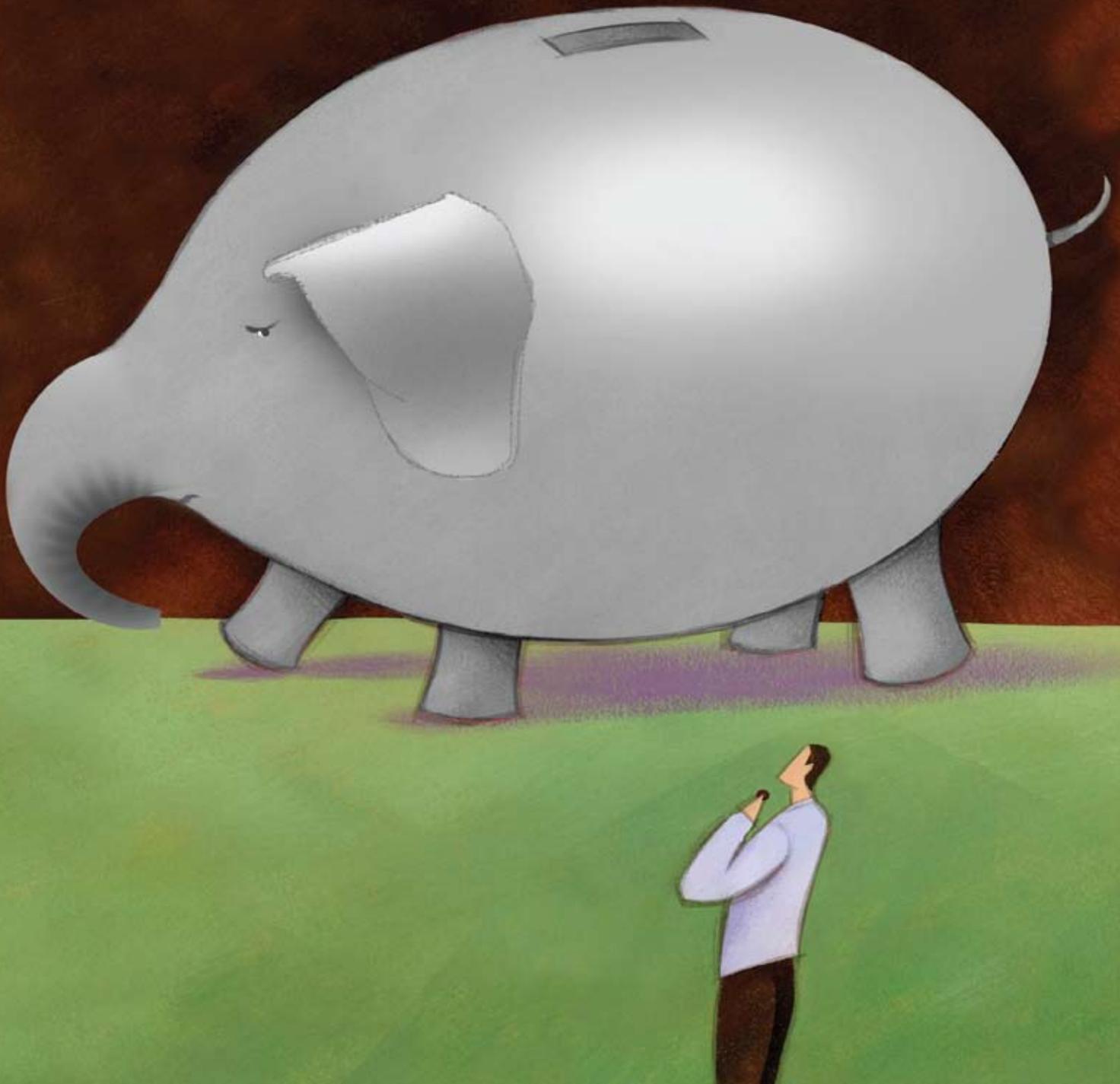
In Oregon, voters approved a new mandatory minimum sentencing law for repeat sex offenders and drunken drivers that will cost \$1.4 million the first year and grow to an estimated \$29.1 million by the fourth year. No new revenue was provided with the measure.

VOTERS VARY

Extreme anti-tax measures in Colorado experienced a different fate. Voters there rejected three citizen initiatives that would have prohibited state borrowing, cut income and property taxes, and phased-out most vehicle and telecommunications taxes and fees. At the same time, they would have required the state to make up the \$1.6 billion in property taxes lost by school districts for K-12 education. Combined, they would have slashed revenue by an estimated \$2.5 billion annually. The loss to local governments would have been \$3.1 billion. The average family would have saved a total of \$1,660 on their taxes each year.

Massachusetts citizens rejected a sales tax cut that would have eliminated \$2.5 billion in state revenues. This marks the third time in eight years voters in the Bay State have rejected a significant tax cut. Proposals in 2002 and 2008 would have eliminated the state's personal income tax altogether.

Voters also got a chance to tinker with the structure of state government and legislatures. Arizonans rejected renaming the office of secretary of state to the office of the lieutenant governor. Nebraska voters decided not to abolish the office of treasurer. And Okla-



homans approved limiting most statewide officeholders to no more than eight years in office. Lawmakers already have term limits in Oklahoma.

Oregon voters said yes to annual sessions of the legislature. But voters in Alaska said no to expanding the size of the Legislature by 10 percent.

POT, CLEAN AIR AND SHARIA LAW

In other ballot news around the country:

◆ Legalized and medical marijuana measures went up in smoke in California, Oregon, South Dakota and Arizona. Expect this issue

to crop up on future ballots, as advocates hope to motivate young and liberal-leaning voters to come out to vote on marijuana and at the same time influence candidate races.

◆ Voters approved blocking federal health care reform in Arizona and Oklahoma but not in Colorado.

◆ Oklahomans made English the official language and prohibited courts from using Sharia or international law in making decisions. They also approved requiring voters to show an ID before voting, making Oklahoma the 27th state to do so.

◆ Californians voted against suspending state

clean air laws until unemployment dropped to 5.5 percent.

◆ Illinois now will have a way to recall the governor, making it the 19th state to adopt the recall for statewide officials.

◆ Vermont voters decided to allow 17-year-olds to vote in primaries if they will turn 18 by the general election.

◆ Michigan and North Carolina voters banned felons from serving in public offices.

If it was a year of anger at incumbents in congressional and state legislative races, it was the year of anxiety for voters battered by the worst economic times in generations. ■