

Don't Stop at the Top of the Ballot

Don't stop after voting for President Nov. 4. Keep working down the ballot. Well toward the bottom are issues vital for Building Trades members. Here are four:

San Francisco Proposition A:

This is the same ballot proposition I supported in September's column, but it is worth discussing it briefly again. State law requires that hospitals meet certain seismic standards, or they must close. San Francisco General Hospital does not meet those standards. Proposition A is an \$887.4 million bond measure to build a new wing of the hospital for its trauma center and acute care. This new wing will fulfill the law and keep the hospital open.

Hospital work is good work for us. Our skills are well suited to its exacting demands. The projects are complex and long-lasting and involve nearly all trades. During an economic downturn such as we are entering, public works such as this keep us alive. Beyond the employment opportunities represented by Proposition A, though, is the fact that General Hospital has saved many of our lives or rescued many of us from more serious injury. All of us perform work variously but genuinely dangerous. If the trauma and acute care facilities at General Hospital had to close, our trades would suffer in the most elemental way.

Vote Yes on Proposition A, and urge your family and friends to do the same.

San Francisco Proposition D:

The 65 waterfront acres around Pier 70 once supported thousands of blue collar jobs. On fifteen of them the ship repair facilities operated now by BAE Systems still offer Building Trades members alternative employment for their skills. The other fifty acres contain old industrial buildings slipping into decrepitude but deemed historic, soils contaminated by more than a century of industrial use, and long-outmoded infrastructure; they constitute San Francisco's own small Rust Belt. The Pier 70 area is under the jurisdiction of the Port of San Francisco. In recent years the Port has considered various schemes of both for-profit and non-profit development for the area. All have foundered on economic shoals.

The Port now calculates that even for-profit developers would need \$600 million of public investment in decontamination, in infrastructure, in parks and open space, and in seismic reinforcement and rehabilitation of the historic structures on the site to make its development worthwhile. The Port is \$100 million short of being able to provide this. Proposition D would permit the Board of Supervisors to issue bonds to bridge the shortfall. The Board could do this only if the Port fulfilled specified conditions to demonstrate that issuing bonds was truly necessary to the development, and the bonds would be repaid, not from citywide tax revenues, but only from tax revenues generated by the Pier 70 area.

The measure would also streamline entitlement for projects proposed for the site, thereby saving time and money to potential project sponsors and possibly attracting more of them.

BAE Systems's lease at Pier 70 doesn't expire until 2017, and the company has been investing in improvements to its facilities there that signal its intent to continue ship repair operations. We need have no fear that the development of the rest of the Pier 70 area will drive those jobs away, and we will insist that it does not.

It is time to return the rest of the site to productive uses. In the short term, of course, its development means jobs for Building Trades members and apprenticeship opportunities for San Franciscans. It also certainly means long-term jobs,

although we can't say of just what kind until proposals come forward. Whatever they are, they will mean some work for us, whether in tenant improvement, in additions and repairs, or in eventual remodels. We will in any case be able to argue on behalf of or against specific proposals before the Port Commission. An idle site gives us no work at all. Just ask our counterparts in the many Midwestern towns where such old industrial sites have stagnated for years.

Tell everyone you know to vote Yes on Proposition D.

San Francisco Proposition O:

For many years San Francisco has levied a "Telephone Users Tax" ("TUT") on commercial telephone users to support its 911 services. The City has not imposed this tax on residential users. Although called a "tax," the TUT has in fact functioned legally as a "fee." To be applied to a specific use, such as 911 services, a tax must be approved by two-thirds of the voters; otherwise a simple majority is adequate. The TUT has never received this approval. Fees may be levied by the Board of Supervisors without voter approval, but there must be a direct connection between the fee charged and the service obtained — as, for example, in paying for a round of golf at a municipal course, or admission to the Zoo, or a building permit. A recent court decision overturning a TUT in Union City similar to San Francisco's said that there was not a direct enough connection between the TUT and 911 services to justify it as a "fee." San Francisco expects that its TUT will be likewise challenged and overturned.

Proposition O would reconstitute the TUT as a tax by obtaining voter approval for it. By removing the requirement that its revenues be applied directly to 911 services, it would need only a simple majority to pass. Its application to 911 services would instead become a matter of City policy. It would generalize the tax to residential as well as commercial users, and would assure that as telephone usage moves away from land lines, new modes of usage are captured.

Although some telephone users would therefore pay slightly more, consider the alternative: A loss of \$45 million in current City revenues, some of which will inevitably mean a loss of Building Trades jobs whether directly for the City or through City contracting. It may well put a strain on emergency services themselves.

Proposition O is well worth the slight expense entailed. Although the Building Trades Council did not take it up for endorsement, it has received the endorsement of the San Francisco Labor Council, and our good friends and allies in Firefighters Local 798 have asked us directly for support.

Vote for Proposition O, and get others to join you.

California Proposition 1A:

High-speed rail is long overdue in California. The I-5 corridor is becoming a more and more expensive link between North and South, both in terms of fuel prices and in the demands the need for oil places on our trade balance and our foreign policy. Electric-powered trains would reduce the use of automobiles and of fossil fuels in that link. Pressure on airports would also be reduced, with less of their capacity required for short flights between the Bay Area and the Los Angeles Basin. The technology has been refined and proven effective for years in Japan and France, where the TGV travels at up to 200 miles per hour in commercial use. The new Transbay Terminal in San Francisco is being designed with accommodation for high-speed rail built in.

And then there are the jobs. Hundreds of miles of tracks, tunnels, bridges, and overhead wires would keep Basic Crafts and Electricians busy for years, and all the trades would have a share in new and refurbished stations.

Proposition 1A would issue \$9.95 billion in bonds as a first step toward the eventual \$40 billion required for the project. \$950 million of this would go toward local rail projects, so that not just the high speed rail corridor will benefit.

Again, during an economic downturn it is public works projects such as high speed rail that help the economy revive and that support our families until it does. Although many among us may feel an impulse to vote against state spending when the state budget is under such strain, projects such as high speed rail have a multiplier effect, in which local expenditures on materials, equipment, and labor lead to other purchases that in turn lead to still other purchases, all along the way creating and sustaining jobs. In time the increased economic activity returns the state's favor and gives back through a range of ordinary taxes. In fact, it is exactly during economic downturn that the multiplier effect is most pronounced, as the famous economist John Maynard Keynes demonstrated in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*: "It is also obvious … that the employment of a given number of men on public works will … have a much larger effect on aggregate employment at a time when there is severe unemployment, than it will have later on when full employment is approached." (Chapter 10.V)

Help yourself, then, and tell others how they can help themselves: Vote Yes on Proposition 1A.