

# OPINION



## EDITORIALS

## Historic election marked by low turnout

Long Beach may increase voter participation by eliminating its March election.

Long Beach voters took to the polls Tuesday to decide who would fill the city's four remaining offices. The most watched race was the battle for mayor, which culminated in a slim 4.2 percent victory for city councilman Robert Garcia, based on the unofficial tally available Friday afternoon. Observers note two historic city firsts. In Mr. Garcia, Long Beach has both its first Latino mayor and its first openly gay mayor. At 36 years old, Mr. Garcia is also one of the city's youngest mayors.

District 1 city council candidate Lena Gonzalez and District 5 city council candidate Stacy Mungo won their seats handily, and Charles Parkin will keep his position as city attorney.

The unofficial tally showed sparse turnout at 17.6 percent, which includes vote-by-mail ballots. Some provisional ballots are still to be validated. A city clerk's office official estimated that once election results are finalized, turnout will be closer to 19 percent, which isn't much better.

Long Beach had unusually low voter engagement in 2014. State-wide, about 18 percent of registered Californians made it to the polls. Orange County's turnout was 19.3 percent, the lowest in recent memory. Only 13 percent voted in Los Angeles County.

This wasn't unexpected, as primary elections tend to draw less attention and have lower turnouts than general elections when the U.S. presidential office is at stake. In contrast, more than two-thirds of registered voters in Long Beach participated in the November 2012 contest that pitted Barack Obama against Mitt Romney. This election was both a primary and a midterm. For both of these reasons it drew less voters.

While voting for president is a healthy exercise in democracy, it would be nice to see more Long

Beach residents tuned in to their local government, especially since many weighty policy questions loom. Furthermore, many decisions made in Washington, D.C. will never permeate middle America, whereas decisions made by city governments routinely impact residents' daily lives. Your vote also has more weight during low turnout elections

Of course, it is a citizen's responsibility to be engaged and informed. But the city can also do a better job at election management. For example, given historical voting trends, choosing to hold mayoral elections during the primary of an off-presidential-year almost guarantees lower turnout.

The bigger worry, however, appears that holding too many elections leads to a reduction of voter participation, a phenomenon known as "voter fatigue."

Turnout in Long Beach was 52.6 percent in the last mid-term general election, November 2010. Perhaps, moving the city's primary from March to June and moving the runoff from June to November would double the amount of participating voters. The city would also save money by cutting the March vote. And for the few voters who can't get enough elections, there is the November runoff.

District 47 U.S. Representative Alan Lowenthal will face Republican candidate Andy Whallon. And in the 70th State Assembly district, Democratic candidate and Long Beach city councilman Patrick O'Donnell is advancing to the runoff and will likely face Republican candidate John Goya. Should Mr. O'Donnell win his Assembly race, another election will be needed next year to fill his District 4 council seat.

We encourage voters to endure, stay engaged and inform themselves in all remaining races during this important election year.

## CARTOON



STEVE SACK / CAGLE

## STATE

## Tax reform for who?

Surveys conflict over how to best reform: flat tax vs. tax hikes.

BY EMILY EKINS  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Raising taxes on the wealthy "appears to be what the people want when you survey them," Gov. Jerry Brown said in 2012 while he was promoting his Proposition 30 tax hikes.

A strong majority, 55 percent, of voters passed Brown's tax increases, which featured a temporary income tax increase on the state's wealthiest residents. Gov. Brown was right: The public does favor raising taxes on the wealthy. Reason-Rupe national telephone surveys find about two-thirds of voters consistently support tax hikes on upper-income households. But the most recent Reason-Rupe poll finds a similar share, 62 percent, favor a flat tax in which everyone would pay the same percentage of their income in taxes.

The poll finds the flat tax has broad appeal that extends across income groups. Sixty-two percent of those earning less than \$30,000 a year favor the flat tax, as do 73 percent of those making more than \$110,000. And 66 percent of Republicans, 68 percent of independents and 52 percent of Democrats support a flat tax.

So what explains the apparent inconsistency between implementing a flat tax and raising taxes on the rich?

Many Americans believe the wealthy are paying fewer taxes than the middle class right now, either through lower tax rates or thanks to tax loopholes and creative accounting.

When Reason-Rupe asked Americans to explain their support for raising taxes on the rich, a little more than half said higher-income households can afford it, with some going so far as to say the wealthy don't need the money. The next most frequent explanation was that the wealthy pay less in taxes than the middle class.

"The wealthier people have

taken advantage of the tax code and us," said one Reason-Rupe respondent.

"There is a loophole where they aren't paying their fair amount" and the rich are "getting a free lunch," said other

volatile, with good years followed by bad, with painful regularity," Brown said. "And while we know our revenues will fluctuate up and down, our long-term liabilities are enormous and ever growing."



BEN MARGOT, AP

Gov. Jerry Brown

survey respondents.

While many Americans believe the wealthy are successfully avoiding their tax obligations, California's tax receipts show this simply isn't true.

The top 1 percent of taxpayers paid 50.6 percent of all state income taxes in 2012. The top 5 percent of California households, those making around \$200,000 a year or more, paid 70 percent of total state income taxes in 2012.

California's reliance on the income taxes and capital gains taxes paid by its richest residents will likely become even more dramatic in coming years as Prop. 30's impacts are fully felt. And while he hasn't given up on taxing the rich, the rainy day proposal Gov. Brown has been pushing shows he at least recognizes the dangers that come with relying on unstable tax revenue streams.

"The business cycle and the stock market are historically

## Beware the sugar police

Safety warning: this label is misleading.

By JULIAN MORRIS  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Senate Bill 1000, which recently passed the Senate's health committee, would require sodas, energy drinks, sports drinks, flavored water – anything with added sweeteners – that have 75 or more calories per 12 ounces to display a warning label reading, "STATE OF CALIFORNIA SAFETY WARNING: Drinking beverages with added sugar(s) contributes to obesity, diabetes and tooth decay."

The key here is "excessive." If a person drinks just one 12-ounce soda per week, is a person putting his or her health at risk? No.

The proposed warning label is misleading. Because it applies only to beverages with added sugar, the label implies that beverages without added sugar are healthy. Apple juice contains the same amount of sugar as Coca-Cola (39 grams per 12 ounces), and orange juice is not far behind (34 grams), but fruit juices would not have sugar warning labels. Consumers who switch to those juices without warnings could actually end up drinking more sugar.

More fundamentally, the warning label is predicated on a mis-

take, namely that consumption of sugary beverages is a major cause of excessive calorie intake – and that by cutting out such beverages, obesity and related problems will decline.

Work undertaken by David Cutler, Edward Glaeser and Jesse Shapiro at Harvard University, suggests that the increase in average weight among Americans since the 1970s is largely a result of an increase in consumption of pre-prepared foods, especially snacks.

If the Harvard researchers' analysis is correct, the proposed warning labels on sugar-sweetened beverages would be worse than useless. Since the warning labels don't apply to food, some consumers might also assume food is not an important part of the problem.

The solution to obesity and related problems lies in moderation, not in warning labels that arbitrarily target select sugary beverages. The only way to eat and drink more healthily is by taking personal responsibility for what we consume.

Julian Morris is vice president of research at Reason Foundation.



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