

COMMENTARY

THE 'BIG LOOK' TASK FORCE

Measure 49 isn't the end of the story

Despite the approval of Measure 49, Oregon's land-use issues are not yet fully resolved. In fact, the system still needs to be studied and changed.

The Oregon Business Association, after an extensive analysis, supported Measure 49, but it was not a unanimous decision. Those who opposed it, and many of those who voted to support it, did so believing that whether it passed or failed Oregon's land-use debate would continue. As a result, the OBA board also unanimously endorsed a return to the "Big Look" land-use review, for which funding was withdrawn in the last legislative session.

Why are so many voices united in demanding that the Big Look complete the task for which it was created? Because it's clear that our current one-size-fits-all system does not work with the diverse landscape Oregonians are fortunate to enjoy.

Some have argued that the outcome of Measure 49 shows that an urban-rural divide doesn't exist in Oregon. But when it comes to land-use regulation, it's not a matter of urban versus rural. It's about a system that was designed for the intense agriculture and forestry opportunities of the heavily populated Willamette Valley and the Coast Range, not for the rest of the state, which has quite different land and weather restrictions.

The Measure 49 vote substantiates that premise. In the counties west of the Cascades and north of Douglas County, it *passed* 69 percent to 31 percent. In the rest of Oregon, it *failed* 55 percent to 45 percent. The immense differences between the two regions are not merely the pro and con vote, but the land mass they represent. The Willam-

ette Valley and north coast region make up just 18 percent of Oregon.

Clearly, Oregon is not homogeneous in its terrain, productivity, soil, weather conditions and length of growing season (one of the most limiting factors in determining crop alternatives). Yet, our current land-use laws don't take these differences into account. And that's just one of the challenges for which the Big Look should be allowed to try to find a solution.

The Big Look task force is our best hope for bringing Oregonians together on comprehensive solutions to our diverse land-use issues. The Big Look plan can be developed outside the partisanship of the Legislature. The task force truly has both the opportunity and responsibility to find a middle ground between the common good and private property rights. Through this process, we have an avenue to help shape Oregon's land-use system into an acceptable program for all areas of the state.

But if the task force is to complete its work prior to the 2009 session, the Legislature must appropriate adequate resources during its February special session.

If we consider the diverse areas of Oregon as well as the diverse needs of its citizens, we can craft a land-use system that will enhance the lives of all Oregonians and stop the divisive referrals and initiatives. The same Oregon legislators who referred Measure 49 now need to take the next step and fully fund the Big Look task force in the February legislative session.



BILL SMITH

IN MY OPINION

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