

Matt's 2024 Election Recommendations

Please feel free to pass this on to others

Hi everyone. Look, I assume there is absolutely no need to tell you how important it is to vote this year, or which candidates to vote for in the many races. But please be sure to vote the **entire ballot**, including the seemingly less important races, and also in favor of all of the judicial retentions.

So...I'm just going to focus on the (too) many ballot issues. Since most readers live in Boulder, I'll start with the 3 city issues. Then the very important regional **RTD issue** – which on my ballot is on the easy-to-miss back side of the second page -- and finally the overload of statewide issues. Most are pretty obvious, not all are very important, but there are quite a few that are of great importance, so please consider **all** of them.

City of Boulder Ballot Issues

- **Question 2C: Council Pay. YES.** This would significantly increase council pay to about \$40,000/year and \$50,000 for the mayor, instead of the current almost \$13,000. Given the huge workload – a conscientious councilmember works 25 -30 hours/week minimum, and often much more – our current system makes serving possible only for folks with money or extremely flexible jobs. I always thought of the low pay as not a salary but just a thank-you, but indeed it almost certainly excludes most of our residents. Will this result in more representative and qualified candidates? Don't know, but it seems worth a try, and certainly fairer to those who do serve. One quibble: I'm not sure setting the salaries as a percentage of our area median income – which is a rather weird statistic for many reasons – is the best approach; I would have preferred setting it as, say, 1/3 the salary of our county commissioners (\$151,000!!), who don't work any harder or longer than councilmembers and rarely face the heated debates and endless hearings so common at council.
- **Question 2D: Executive Sessions. YES!** Well, this is probably doomed to failure since voters don't like the idea of "secret" meetings – even though Boulder is about the only place where they are not allowed. The key here is that "secret" meetings already happen – regularly – but in a much less efficient, and completely non-transparent manner. Currently, when certain matters just can't be discussed publicly – say, some sort of negotiations or legal matter – the city attorney and staff meet quietly, with no public notice, with 2 councilmembers at a time. Not just absurdly time-consuming, the real problems are that there is no public notice and no chance – ever – for each councilmember to hear the thoughts of all their colleagues. It's a terrible system, but necessary since there is currently no alternative. Do some cities abuse executive sessions? Perhaps, although state law is clear, and abuse requires agreement/collusion among all 9 councilmembers and the city attorney, which is rather unlikely. Please, finally, let's remove this originally well-meaning constraint, which does far more damage than good.
- **Question 2E Boards and Commission Changes. YES.** I imagine this will fail too as some will see it as a council power-grab of some sort. But the current rules already give council considerable flexibility in creating new Boards and removing Board members for "cause." An independent committee recommended these changes so we could get more diverse applicants for Boards and make the Boards easier to serve on. Note, importantly, that Boards separately defined in the City Charter will **not** be affected, and this includes the most critical ones like Planning, Open Space, and Parks.

RTD Ballot Issue

Issue 7A: Removing TABOR Constraints ("De-Bruceing") Existing Revenues. YES. OK, we all love to hate RTD, and they certainly could be better. But with limited revenues and a ridiculously large district (biggest in the US),

political tensions requiring service to sprawling low-density suburbs, COVID-related ridership declines, serious (at least perceived) safety issues due to societal problems neither caused by or solvable by RTD, significant maintenance needs due to prior under-funding, etc. ... well, look, they do a pretty decent job I think and seem to be on the right track. Except that if this ballot issue fails, RTD will lose 10% of its revenues and almost certainly go into a serious downward spiral with reduced service. No tax increase here, just letting RTD keep the tax revenues it already receives so service can improve, as is currently planned for early next year.

Statewide Ballot Issues

Amendment G: Expand property tax exemption to additional veterans. YES. Sure, seems fair. Even fairer would be reimaging the whole property tax mess, but for now this tiny change is good.

Amendment H: Create an independent judicial discipline board. YES. Lots of problems with the current system, to be sure. Perhaps this doesn't go far enough, which is why some are opposed, but it seems like a good start, with a far more independent oversight board that can create new regulations.

Amendment I: Allow denial of bail in first-degree murder cases. YES. This fixes an unintended change when we modified the bail system to make it fairer, and accidentally made it impossible to deny bail in such murder cases.

Amendment J: Remove the existing ban on same-sex marriage. YES. No discussion needed, I assume. Yes, the Supremes currently support same-sex marriage, but that could certainly change, and its prohibition clearly doesn't belong in our state constitution.

Amendment K: Change some election deadlines. YES. A minor fix to give election officials a little more time to prepare for elections.

Amendment 79: Add the right to abortion to the state constitution. YES. Again, no discussion needed, I assume, and more important than ever given the overturning of Roe and who knows what might come next. It also removes the current restriction on state/local governments from including abortion services in their insurance plans.

Amendment 80: Add school choice (and possibly vouchers) to the state constitution. NO. The state already allows school choice (I confess I'm not thrilled with that, as a supporter of public schools), and you can be certain that this issue is yet another step along the way to creating a statewide school voucher program so our tax dollars can support private/religious/right-wing schools.

Proposition JJ: Keep all sport betting tax revenue to fund water conservation. YES. Pretty simple, yet another TABOR "De-bruceing" that allows all taxes – only on sports betting – to be retained, and then spent on various much-needed water conservation programs. If this fails, those revenues go back to the casinos!

Proposition KK: Place a 6.5% tax on guns to fund mental health services. YES. Although maybe a 1000% tax would be better.... No, this won't do anything to reduce gun/ammo sales, but it will at least raise some much-needed money for mental health services, which are woefully lacking in Colorado.

Proposition 127: Prohibit hunting of mountain lions and bobcats. YES. Lots of debate about this, with "experts" on both sides. But most independent experts are in favor, and certainly the concept of phony "sportsmen" shooting mountain lions at point-blank range after they are treed by dogs is rather revolting. It's not surprising the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) is opposed, supposedly on scientific grounds, since CPW has always been

under the sway of hunters (whose fees provide most of CPW's revenues) and ranchers. CPW's recent handling of wolves is quite non-scientific, again supporting ranchers (who aren't required to take even the most basic measures to protect their herds) instead of wildlife. There are plenty of exceptions to protect people and, yes, livestock, and in the unlikely event this does causes problems in a few decades it's easy enough to fix.

Proposition 128: Increase prison time for certain offenses before parole eligibility. NO. Brought to us by the right-wing Advance Colorado, this would require certain violent criminals to serve 85% of their sentence instead of the current 75% before being eligible for parole -- thus reducing their incentive to change their behaviors in order to return home sooner, increasing prison costs for the state, and undermining the reasonably well-run parole system that we now have.

Proposition 129: Establish a new veterinary professional associate profession. NO. This certainly seems appealing, promising to create a new position that could help reduce the overly-high vet fees we now face. I checked with our vet of 35+ years, who also initially found this promising, but now opposes it (along with almost all humane societies) since the new VPAs will not get the training they need to do the work they supposedly will do, it is extremely unlikely that any vet prices will be reduced, and even the theory that this will create more vets for rural areas is bogus since there is no requirement for large-animal training. Also, I don't think that voters should be deciding on the creation of a specific new professional category, since we obviously have no clue whatsoever. Are we doing the same thing with Prop 127? No, I don't think so since it's a much simpler issue with less at stake (well, perhaps not for the lions...), although in a more rational system these issues would not be decided by popular vote after an organization with the money/volunteers can essentially force it on the ballot.

Proposition 130: Spend \$350 million (with no new funding source) on police training. NO. Another fine mess from Advance Colorado. Nothing really wrong with having the state contribute more to policing, but this would -- by design -- take that \$350 million from other programs, including those like mental health, housing, schools, etc. that can help reduce the level of crime. Let the state legislature sort this out, especially given the projected huge revenue shortfall coming next year.

Proposition 131: Create a new "jungle" primary system and ranked-choice-voting general elections. NO. I suspect this will pass, unfortunately, since it looks fairly reasonable at first glance. There are two parts to this, and the first part is the bigger problem: a "jungle" primary where all candidates (for statewide/congressional/senatorial/legislature) positions run in a heap and the top 4 go to the November election. This completely by-passes the political parties, which some may like, but in doing so it almost certainly gives far more power to folks with big money, who can help game the outcome. Note that this is a feature, not a bug, since this issue is brought to us by a billionaire and his buddies, and they very much like being able to control things. Political parties sure aren't perfect, but they should be able to select their candidates, and in Colorado non-affiliated voters can already vote in the party primary of their choice so their voice is heard.

Part two is that the general election will use ranked-choice voting (RCV). RCV does often have merit (it was used for the first time in Boulder's recent mayoral election, and resulted in the "correct" outcome), but like any voting system it isn't perfect and can yield a more extreme winner instead of a more moderate one. Again, the proposed system would seem to give even more clout to those with lots of money than is now the case.

Our voting systems probably could use some updates, but rather more slowly and carefully than this huge change, and then only in conjunction with some effective way to keep the billionaires at bay. And given all the phony uproar over election security, one can only imagine what will happen with such a new, far more complex system. Our County Clerks are opposed because they simply don't have the resources or time to deal with these vast changes. Let's avoid that chaos for now, keep working on it, and stop letting the zillionaires get their way.