Proposition 13 on the March 3, 2020 ballot:

Hidden agenda in masquerading big bond measure

By **JON COUPAL**
PUBLISHED: November 24, 2019 at 12:00 pm | UPDATED: November 24, 2019 at 12:50 pm

In a bit of irony, this March there will be a Proposition 13 on the California statewide ballot. But unlike the landmark taxpayer protection of 1978, the Prop. 13 of 2020 will put taxpayers on the hook for $27 billion.

There's another big difference between Prop. 13 (1978) and Prop. 13 (2020). The first was the result of a massive grassroots campaign by citizen taxpayers and homeowners striking back against out-of-control property taxes while the fake Prop. 13 was put on the ballot by the California legislature.

Prop. 13 (2020) is a huge $15 billion statewide school bond chock full of hidden traps for taxpayers. First, it reflects typical credit card math by Sacramento politicians because it would borrow $15 billion from Wall Street and then make taxpayers pay it back plus 80% in total interest costs. That's an additional $12 billion we'll be forced to pay, bringing the entire bill to $27 billion.

While no one disputes the need for adequate school facilities, the problem is that the state's education establishment has failed to show that it uses existing school facility bond money effectively. California voters already have approved big school bonds, including a recent 2016 $7 billion measure, only to see much of those funds squandered. (Remember the infamous Belmont High School scandal when LAUSD wasted *hundreds* of millions building the nation's most expensive high school on top of a toxic waste site?)

But this measure also presents a huge threat to homeowners. While it is true that the bond itself will be repaid out of the state's general fund, local school districts are required to provide matching funds except on very rare occasions. Those matching funds are generated by *local* bond measures which are repaid exclusively by *property* owners.

Currently, there are strict limits on how much bond debt local school districts are allowed to carry. But a hidden provision of Prop. 13 (2020) nearly doubles the limits school districts can borrow. This means huge increases in property taxes are a near certainty. Who pays property taxes? We all do, either directly in property tax bills or through higher rents and other costs. Unlike the Prop. 13 from 1978, this Prop. 13 puts all taxpayers at risk of higher taxes.

There are other hidden landmines in this bond proposal including a preference for school construction projects that employ a "project labor agreement." This gift to the construction trade unions can easily add 25% to 30% to the cost of school construction and freeze out responsible construction companies. That additional cost is money that could be spent building and refurbishing more school projects that benefit our children.

Of course, the real problem here is that the governor and legislature have failed to make the actual education of California's youth a priority. Instead of spending the state's $21 billion surplus on upgrading school facilities and providing high quality education for our children, the governor and the legislature are wasting our money on pet projects like high speed rail. That surplus money could have gone into solutions for our education system *without new debt*.

California's schools are consistently ranked near the lowest in the country.
Rather than throwing $27 billion into school construction projects, our state needs a long-term solution to achieve a high standard of excellence in reading, writing and math. To do that we must reform teacher tenure, make it easier for school districts to fire bad employees, ensure more taxpayer dollars go directly into the classroom, restore the exit exam and expand school choice.

The fake Prop. 13 appearing in March does nothing to improve classroom instruction or help our children succeed.

Jon Coupal is president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.