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2021 VOTER GUIDE

DENVER

The following are Independence Institute's voting recommendations based on its review of all ballot measures.

Recommendation **VOTE NO**

Referred Question 2A: Denver Facilities System Bonds

Why we oppose Referred Question 2A

\$104 million for Denver facilities projects like repairs, improvements, and accessibility work at public buildings like Botanic Gardens, Museum of Nature and Science, Bonfils Theater Complex, and the Zoo.

Of all the bond measures, this is the most tempting to approve, but still falls short. While many may be good ideas, in a multi-billion dollar budget not everything can or should be of equivalent priority. With an underreported looming pension crisis that may begin crowding out other spending, taxpayers may want to keep their powder dry for that issue.

Recommendation **VOTE NO**

Referred Question 2B: Denver Housing and Sheltering System Bonds

Why we oppose Referred Question 2B

\$38.6 million for housing and shelter projects like building or renovating shelters for the homeless, including but not limited to buying and converting buildings into shelters.

The first phase of a recent study showed that the Denver metro area is already spending almost half a billion dollars per year on homelessness, and this proposal looks like more of what's already not working, and won't make a dent in the problem. Fortunately, the citizens of the city have put something better on the ballot with Initiated Ordinance 303.

Recommendation **VOTE NO**

Referred Question 2C: Denver Transportation and Mobility System Bonds

Why we oppose Referred Question 2C

\$63.3 million for transit project, such as sidewalks and bike lanes, adding a cultural and arts district to Morrison Road; and adding an urban trail to downtown.

With the exception of sidewalks, this isn't transportation to help people get from one place to another. Rather, it's a set of boutique toys that helps only narrow, targeted populations. I've seen bike paths mandated against the near-universal objection of the residents, for example. Cultural and arts districts are great, and they work best when they're organic. You want to help mobility? Help RTD put more buses on the road in a way that doesn't impede other traffic.

Recommendation **VOTE NO**

Referred Question 2D: Denver Parks and Recreation System Bonds

Why we oppose Referred Question 2D

\$54 million for parks projects in northeast and south Denver. This would include restoring basketball and tennis courts, soccer and baseball fields, upgrading playgrounds, and rebuilding a neighborhood pool.

Again, this is a question of priorities. In some cases, the proposed projects are only thinly justified and may not be needed at all. If this question is anything like the other projects on the list, we suspect this was initially bundled together to make Referred Question 2E more palatable.

NEUTRAL

Referred Question 2E: National Western Campus Facilities System Bonds

Why we are neutral on Referred Question 2E

This is a \$190 million bond to rehab the crumbling National Western Center campus, plus build a multi-use arena. 2E does not raise taxes.

We rarely support debt packages, except on needed key physical infrastructure [note our “Fix Our Damn Roads” initiative a couple years back]. The National Western Stock Show has been a key part of Colorado’s economy and history, and one of the few opportunities for rural interests to be appreciated in the urban corridor which has been so hostile to the rural lifestyle. We’d hope a private developer could find a way to make it work without increasing public debt, but that developer hasn’t materialized and likely may never. Is the debt worth saving this institution?

**Recommendation
VOTE YES**

Referred Question 2F: Denver Housing and Shel- tering System Bonds

Why we support Referred Question 2F

Reverses Denver City Council’s February decision to allow up to five unrelated people to live in a single home. The measure would also repeal the council’s decision to expand halfway houses into residential areas, when previously they were only permitted in industrial areas.

Regardless of what we think about zoning, it exists, and people often buy their homes based on the neighborhood [defined by how it’s zoned]. If someone wants, for example, to increase density or permit commercial development, it is a local change that City Council approves with significant input from local residents. Here, Denver City Council made a massive city-wide change with residents having little-to-no understanding about what it was doing. Take back your neighborhood and send City Council a message at the same time.

**Recommendation
VOTE NO**

Referred Question 2G: Fill Future Vacancies for Independent Monitor

Why we oppose Referred Question 2G

The Office of the Independent Monitor oversees disciplinary investigations into Denver’s police and sheriff’s departments and recommends policy changes. The measure would remove the Monitor’s appointment from the mayor and give it to the volunteer Citizen Oversight Board [COB].

The COB already has substantial and significant input into policy changes and investigations. It is not competent to hire permanent officials and it risks putting too much power into the hands of activists at a time when violent crime is already soaring.

**Recommendation
VOTE NO**

Referred Question 2H: Election Day Change

Why we oppose Referred Question 2H

Denver Clerk and Recorder Paul Lopez would like to move the city’s general elections to an earlier date in odd-numbered years. More specifically, the election date would be moved from the first Tuesday of May to the first Tuesday in April. Since runoffs are held in June, Lopez argues that it would give his office more time to get ballots to Denver residents living abroad or traveling.

This measure might make it easier on the Clerk’s office but will make it harder on candidates. These elections occur a few months following the big federal and statewide elections in even-numbered years, and by the time people start paying attention, time is already short. It’s good to want to make it easier for qualified citizens to vote, but it’s also important they have good information before doing so.

**Recommendation
VOTE NO**

Initiated Ordinance 300: Pandemic Research Fund

Why we oppose Initiated Ordinance 300

This measure would increase Denver’s local marijuana sales tax from 10.3% to 11.8% to raise \$7 million annually for the University of Colorado Denver CityCenter. Seventy-five percent of the money would go to research on personal protective equipment, disinfection and sterilization technology, and design features of physical spaces. The remaining twenty-five percent would be limited to researching public policy and planning. No more than 8% of the money raised by the tax increase could be spent on administrative expenses.

There must be ample grant money already available for this type of research, not to mention there is already extensive scientific literature on mask use, ventilation, and other measures. Of note, at least one statewide ballot question, Proposition 119, is already targeting marijuana taxes as a potential revenue source.

Recommendation
VOTE YES

Initiated Ordinance 301:
Parks and Open Spaces

Why we support Initiated Ordinance 301

This would require voter approval for any commercial or residential development on city parks or land protected by a city-owned conservation easement, or for the cancellation of any such easement. Development that is “consistent with park purposes, easement purposes, or for cultural facilities” would be exempt.

We’re not opposed to development, and in a city where housing supply and demand is more out of balance than nearly anywhere in the country, housing supply is a must. However, this is city-owned property set aside for the benefit of residents, not a restriction on private property. Let the residents have a say.

Recommendation
VOTE NO

Initiated Ordinance 302:
Conservation Easement

Why we oppose Initiated Ordinance 302

A countermeasure to Initiated Ordinance 301, this would amend the definition of “conservation easement” to apply only to those reviewed and approved by the state Division of Conservation. Developers proposed this ordinance to allow development on the Park Hill golf course, currently covered by a city conservation easement.

It’s unclear that the Division of Conservation is any better at making these decisions than local departments. If a developer wants to develop Park Hill Golf Course, he/she can make the case about why it’s a good idea. But proposing a broader rule change over a specific property will almost certainly have other, unintended consequences.

Recommendation
VOTE YES

Initiated Ordinance 303:
Homelessness, Compassion and Safety

Why we support Initiated Ordinance 303

This measure, proposed by Garrett Flicker, chair of the Denver Republican Party, would prevent camping on private property without written permission from owners. It would also allow up to four city-funded designated camping sites on public property, requiring running water, restrooms, and lighting. The measure would allow anyone to file a complaint and require the city to take enforcement action within three days. If the city doesn’t take such action, anyone may sue the city and recover attorney fees.

Denver residents reinstated a camping ban, much like in Austin, Texas. Now Denver residents are being asked to follow another successful Austin homeless initiative—creating designated homeless encampments that are safer, sanitary, easier to police, and less vulnerable to predatory influences like drug dealers. It would instruct a recalcitrant city to make enforcement of the camping ban a priority.

Recommendation
VOTE YES

Initiated Ordinance 304:
Denver Sales Tax Cap

Why we support Initiated Ordinance 304

This measure, also proposed by Flicker, would reduce Denver’s aggregate sales and use tax rate from 4.81% to 4.50%. It would also cap the rate at 4.50% so that if voters approve new sales taxes above the cap, the city will need to adjust existing sales taxes to fit under the cap.

Governing needs to be about setting priorities, not just asking for more money on a wish list with the assumption that someone else will always pay. And sales taxes are regressive, meaning that the poor and lower middle-class usually end up disproportionately paying for that wish list. By capping the total sales tax rate, Denver can get citizens and City Council to ask not only if an item is a good idea, but a good idea compared to what? And it might even help promote job growth in a city where the unemployment rate has gone from one of the best to one of the worst.