

Participatory Democracy Works

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By: ROSEANN MIKOS

Do voters make good planners? They certainly can. And sometimes they have no choice but to take things into their own hands—because of the failure of their duly elected public officials to listen and to “feel the pulse” of the community on important issues. Let’s never forget that we live in a participatory democracy where we are supposed to have government “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” As members of the public, we have an obligation to participate as fully as possible in the decisions affecting us and our quality of life.

There is nothing more “American” than when regular everyday people **demand** to have a vote on an issue near and dear to their hearts. Isn’t it interesting that the same people who complain about public apathy regarding some issues, often tend to cry foul when the public gets serious and mobilizes to place something on the ballot with which they, the supposedly wise elected officials, do not agree?

When “we the people” qualify an issue for the ballot, it is the antithesis of public apathy. Indeed, it says that people care so much about an issue that they are afraid to leave it up to just five people to decide upon (or to seven, or to however many serve on the relevant decision-making body). It says they don’t trust their public officials to make the right decision—and that only by a vote of the people, can we be sure that the people’s will will prevail.

Caveat—no one (the general public or the decision-making bodies) should place an issue on the ballot which is unconstitutional or otherwise against the law—unless it’s to change a law via appropriate due process. If they do, and an appropriate challenge is made, the courts will sort out what is or is not allowed to stand.

To those who say that the public is not smart enough to decide, is not up to speed on the “real” issues, doesn’t understand the complexity of a particular issue or situation, or simply waited too long to get involved and don’t know “how it’s done,” I say “hogwash!” Every elected official was at one time just a member of the public like you or me. If they can do it (decide on tough issues), why can’t we?

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Don't get me wrong. I do not advocate putting every single issue to the voters. In fact, I get as angry and

disillusioned as everyone else when there are 20 or 30 initiatives on the State Ballot during some election years.

"WE the people" should not have to decide on every important issue ourselves.

That's why we elect public officials—whose job it is to gather, study, and weigh the facts, educate the public about the issues, listen to what people want done, and then vote accordingly. But when the elected officials don't come through, that's when "we the people" have to do something about it.

That's how it's done here in America, in California, in Ventura County, and in your city (if you live in a city).

Thank goodness for our participatory democracy. If we do not take charge ourselves, when necessary, then we could be unwittingly encouraging an unintentional form of dictatorship. Is that what you want? I don't.

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