

## **Cussen: Spare some sympathy for the voters of California - really**

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### **Body**

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As you Canadians watch the U.S. election spectacle from the balcony, eagerly awaiting the final act, I'd like to get some sympathy for us voters on the left coast in California.

As I'm married to a Canadian from Ottawa, I daily get eye rolls as to what we Californians have to put up with. But our mailbox is full of political ads; these aren't in envelopes, but on full page glossy card stock. I've got 44 of them so far, some positive and some negative as to the character of the opponent or the advantages or failings of the propositions.

Propositions, you ask? What are you talking about?

Well let's go back to the very early 1900s when the populist movement was taking hold. Writers like Sinclair Lewis and politicians like Teddy Roosevelt came after the big corporations and trusts that controlled the American side of the Industrial Revolution. In California, the bad guy was the Southern Pacific Railroad. It controlled the state legislature. In order to get around its power, the governor at the time, a populist named Hiram Johnson, was able to get a law passed that allowed citizens to propose laws directly for popular vote, circumventing the SP-controlled legislature. So here we are today, after 120 years or so of "propositions" put before the people. Let me give you an idea of what I'm supposed to vote on Tuesday.

There are 12 propositions laid out in an 112-page booklet by the California Secretary of State. Yes, 112 pages of small type with the proponents and opponents of each proposition having their say. If you're inclined to read the actual proposed law or changes to the existing law, you can write for a printed copy.

Here are big ones that I get all the mailers for:

. **Prop 15** will change the way commercial property is assessed and will generate more property tax revenue;

. **Prop 21** will allow more local governments to install rent control;

. **Prop 22** will allow Uber and Lyft drivers to operate as independent contractors as they did before the California Legislature changed the law and made them employees;

. **Prop 23** changes the state law on dialysis clinics to make it mandatory to have a doctor on site.

And those are just the big ones where the factions have poured millions into ads, including in my mailbox.

And now I've got eight more to plow through: Should I approve a bond measure on stem cell research, allow diversity in government hiring, give released prisoners the right to vote, allow 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they turn 18 before the general election, allow homeowners and heirs to transfer their lower property tax assessment to new properties, change the "three-strikes" law to remove non-violent offences, change the privacy

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laws to let social media do something which is beyond my understanding (I'll vote No), and finally, replace the bail bond system with an risk assessment evaluation? And in my local town, they want to raise the sales tax one per cent. That's 13 issues I have to deal with.

As for candidates for our state legislature, we've got two people throwing barbs at each other: 12 mailers for the incumbent and 13 for the challenger.

Sometimes I think my wife is right, that Canada is a lot saner than the United States. But I'm afraid of the Queensway in the snow!

Michael Cussen is a retired CPA who lives in Central California. He normally spends August in Canada.  
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