

It's time to vote for Measure 57

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Oregonians, like citizens in many other states, moved several years ago to assure that violent criminals did long, hard time behind bars for their offenses. Now they face a pair of measures that would dramatically stiffen the state's response to property crimes — identity theft, car theft, drug trafficking, theft from the elderly and others — in somewhat the same way. One, Measure 61, requires mandatory minimum sentences from the first crime forward. The other, Measure 57, takes a much more reasoned approach to the problem.

We discussed Measure 61 and its flaws just about a month ago. It's impossible to judge the true cost of the initiative, but even Kevin Mannix, its sponsor, believes it's likely to be expensive. Just as bad, it does nothing to prepare those it throws in the clink for the inevitable time they're freed. Lock-'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key justice might make the rest of us feel good for a time; it does nothing to protect society in the long run by getting criminals with drug and alcohol problems the treatment they need to live crime-free lives once they're out of prison.

That's one of several differences between 61 and its alternative, Measure 57.

Measure 57 is a product of the legislative session held earlier this year. While it does not impose mandatory sentences in the same way 61 does, it does make clear to courts that Oregonians expect repeat offenders to do time behind bars. In fact, without other considerations a repeat offender could expect to do time, two or three years in some cases, much, much longer in others.

Moreover, it mandates drug and alcohol treatment for offenders most likely to repeat their crimes. Those who refuse — seeking treatment remains voluntary — face penalties for their refusal. That's the only sensible response to the current situation that can see offenders enter prison hooked on drugs only to be released a few months later with the same addiction still driving their behavior.

Nearly all of Oregon's district attorneys are supporting Measure 57, which is similar to a bill they supported in the 2007 Legislature. That's important to know — DAs will have the final say about charging criminals under either measure, and even they are unwilling to see the state assume the costs Measure 61 would bring. Deschutes County's district attorney, Mike Dugan, likes Measure 57 because, in his words, it takes into consideration the seriousness of the crime, the treatment needed to prevent a repeat performance, and the protection of the community.

Voters will have to choose between the two measures this fall, and the one with the most votes wins. Measure 61 may sound tougher, but in a state where cash already is hard to come by, it's sure to be expensive and it does nothing to address the core problems that keep many criminals offending even after time in prison.

Measure 57 is also tough, though in a far more reasoned manner. Moreover, it aims to address the addictions that put many offenders on the road to crime in the first place. Simply locking

criminals up without treatment does nothing to protect society in the long run, a truth Measure 57 addresses. It should be approved.

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