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**A GUIDE TO THE  
CALIFORNIA  
PROPS  
NOV. 2020**

FEATURING THE UNSOLICITED OPINIONS OF:

**LILA NORDSTROM / BRENT THORNBURG**



**NOTE ON METHODOLOGY:** Our methodology is...all over the place. We read endorsements from papers and organizations that are generally aligned with our values, but we also consult many that aren't. With the CA props, sometimes your enemy is your friend. Either way, we always recommend looking beyond the official ballot guide.

PROP	VOTE	WHY?
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Issues \$5.5 billion in bonds to the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, a state-funded stem cell research institute founded in 2004.

14	NO, w/ hesitations.	<p>Before we even begin, what we are definitely voting #NO on is putting voters on the hook to decipher this proposal. Nobody aside from a small group of inside players should need to know the financial details of our state-funded stem cell research program, yet here we are, people who must vote on this prop. The background here is that 16 years ago, after the Bush administration banned federal funding from going to stem cell research due to the demands of the pro-life movement (lol), California voters agreed to borrow \$3 billion to create a state-funded stem cell research program, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM). That money is now gone and the CIRM is asking for another \$5.5 billion in government bonds, which, with interest, is likely to cost taxpayers something closer to \$7.8 billion. Some of the oversight rules would be tightened in this new funding burst, possibly because the organization has faced repeated concerns over its board's conflicts of interest, but it's basically a continuation of a program that already exists.</p> <p>On the face of it, it's generally a good idea to have stem cell research. A lot of fairly reasonable state politicians are in support, and this prop seems like a no-brainer. As with so many of these proposals, however, there is more to the story. We always have major concerns when the campaign to pass a large bonds measure is being led by an individual rich person. Prop 14 is largely the brainchild of a wealthy Palo Alto real estate investor and stem cell fan named Robert N. Klein II, who's been behind many of the stem cell props of yore. Though medical research is an area rife with major philanthropic donors, Klein and co. can't seem to find any private funding for this research, which is why they've come back to taxpayers, hat in hand. And with all the respect in the world to the scientists looking for cures to terrible diseases, this is a weird time for a rich guy to ask for this much public money for a pet project. The federal funding ban that justified the 2004 funding prop was lifted in 2009, and California is going to be facing a major budget shortfall in the coming months and years. While usually we're very pro public spending and very anti private philanthropy, it feels like Robert N. Klein II could focus less on advertising to us and more on hitting up his fellow rich people for money (or the federal government, which is who should actually be funding this research). The people of California should not have to cover the costs of a whole nation's scientific advancement by ourselves during a 27-pronged health and environmental crisis that's affecting us disproportionately.</p> <p>Vote NO on Prop 14. We only add "with hesitation" because who can possibly know what the long-term consequences of having literally <i>any</i> position on this issue are. This is why we hire legislators. It would be cool if they could handle stuff like this for us.</p>
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PROP	VOTE	WHY?
<b>Requires commercial and industrial properties to be taxed based on market value and dedicates the revenue to fire protection and other local concerns.</b>		
<b>15</b>	<b>YES, w/ gusto!</b>	<p>Back in 1978, California voters passed Prop 13, a measure that allowed many property owners to pay taxes based on the purchase price of their property instead of its most recent assessed value. Prop 13 applied to both commercial and residential units, so you may remember hearing about it during 2018's Prop 5 battle and you will hear about it again coming up in Prop 19. On the commercial side, Prop 13 has meant that even as property values and commercial rents skyrocket across the state, many commercial owners remain grandfathered into incredibly low property tax rates, robbing the glorious people of California, and specifically California students, of billions in local funding.</p> <p>Prop 15 would amend the state's constitution so that commercial properties with values of over \$3 million (with the exception of commercial agricultural properties) are assessed at their current value. The change would send an estimated \$8 - \$12.5 billion into local coffers, helping to fund schools, parks, and other necessary public services. Though Prop 15's opposition is incredibly well-funded (large commercial property owners are the very people who can buy up lots of local ad time and threaten to move their businesses elsewhere), don't buy into the confusing anti-15 hype! This money is not only critical to making a just recovery from the financial fallout of COVID-19, but will help ensure that communities have the funding they need to pay for needed services into the future.</p> <p>And to any rich commercial property owners reading: get over yourselves. Also, we're accepting Venmo payments for that free advice. Inquire within and vote YES on Prop 15.</p>
<b>Repeals Proposition 209 (1996), which bans the use of affirmative action in public employment, education, or contracting.</b>		
<b>16</b>	<b>YES</b>	<p>The 90s were not a high point in California prop voting, and among the many nonsense-minded policies passed in that era was Prop 209, a 1996 measure that banned public institutions in the state from using affirmative action policies in university admissions and public sector hiring. The ban was, at the time, framed as a policy that would prevent a vague sort of "discrimination" (like, against white straight cis people?), but considering that our nation and state both have a LONG history of institutionalized discrimination, all this did was further enshrine into law hiring and admissions policies benefitting the most privileged and overrepresented among us. Also, the fact that we were the first state in the union to ban affirmative action is just so, so, so embarrassing, especially considering who followed suit (Texas...yes, <i>that</i> Texas...was hot on our heels).</p> <p>The thing is, we know that affirmative action policies, while not perfect, do help diversify institutions and create opportunities for members of historically disadvantaged communities. We should endeavor to make our public institutions as diverse and representative as possible because we all know that our government and public sector agencies aren't going to solve the problems of people who don't have a seat at the table.</p> <p>Vote YES on Prop 16. Honestly, it's the VERY least we can do to create a more equitable, just, and gosh let's just face it happier society.</p>

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PROP	VOTE	WHY?
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**Restores the voting rights to people convicted of felonies who are on parole.**

17	YES	<p>People who are on parole after being convicted of felonies do not cease to be human beings living in society. What they do cease to be is in prison, meaning they have already done the thing and are now back in our communities attempting to rebuild their lives. We make that process hard enough without also robbing them of a voice in civic life. Prop 17 isn't one of those splashy expensive props being championed by big moneyed interests – it was placed on the ballot by the California Legislature and is just quietly going about its business. Californians have voted on props like this before – 1974's Prop 10 restored voting rights to people who had <i>completed</i> parole – but it's time to join the 19 other states that allow parolees to vote too.</p> <p>For the curious, there are a lot of reasons to support policies that expand voting rights to returning citizens. Like with most things relating to the criminal justice system, voting bans that target incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people wind up disproportionately affecting poor people and people of color. They act as a targeted form of voter suppression. In California, three-fourths of the nearly 50,000 parolees that would see their rights restored under Prop 17 are people of color. Three-fourths! And while critics of expanding voting rights often justify their position by pointing to the other ways we limit the rights of parolees – they can't own firearms, for example – in most cases these limitations are public safety-minded, not retribution-minded. There is no public safety issue with letting parolees (or any citizen) vote. It's a move that can only increase safety by giving people a voice and an investment in their community. Plus, we're talking about taxpayers here. We shouldn't be limiting the voting rights of taxpaying Americans because that's literally taxation without representation, which, as DC's license plates will tell you, is a bad thing.</p> <p>Restoring voting rights is a craze that's sweeping the nation – even a bunch of conservative Southern states have tried or actually succeeded at doing it. We've gone on the record suggesting that even people IN prison should have the right to vote (who is more invested in and affected by public policy than prisoners?), and maybe you don't agree with us there, but certainly once returning citizens have completed their prison sentences, they should also get to be...treated like citizens. People on parole are only on parole because they have already paid their debt to society. They should have a voice in how that society is governed. Vote YES on Prop 17.</p>
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**Allows 17-year-olds who will be 18 at the time of the next general election to vote in primaries and special elections.**

18	YES	<p>It seems like the people who will help determine the outcome of a general election should get a say in the primary, right? Especially in California, where our crazy pants jungle primary system means that the primaries are often as decisive as the General. Enter: Prop 18. Passing it will mean that anybody who meets the criteria to vote in the General Election will, by default, also meet the criteria to vote in the primary. Easy peasy. (And for those of you from parts of the country where this saying goes on and on, let us just add: lemon squeasy.) Vote YES on Prop 18.</p>
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PROP	VOTE	WHY?
19	YES	<p>Another adjustment to 1978's Prop 13 that alters the rules around tax assessment transfers and property inheritance.</p> <p>This year's Prop 19 is yet another chapter in the story of 1978's Prop 13 and its ensuing fallout. The ballot-infamous Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association is the sole organization opposing, and look, nobody takes them seriously anyway, but let's dive into what Prop 19 would mean. For all its drama, there are reasons we haven't eliminated yesteryear's Prop 13 entirely. The impact on the elderly would be pretty disastrous, for example. The measure's artificially low tax rates keep seniors in their homes, ensure people can afford to keep their homes in the family, ensure that family farms can afford to keep operating, etc.</p> <p>With Prop 19, the state has tried to figure out workarounds to separate the people who are exploiting the Prop 13 loopholes from those that rely on them. It does a decent job of that, all while raising some money that would be earmarked for local concerns like fire prevention, schools, housing programs, safe drinking water, etc. Sorry, there's no way to make the details hilarious because property taxes are boring AF, but here's some of what Prop 19 would do to accomplish all this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue Prop 13's tax assessment transfers (even to more expensive homes, though with an upward adjustment), to seniors, people with disabilities, and disaster victims.</li><li>• Allow families to continue transferring properties valued at up to \$1 million to their children or grandchildren at the lower, grandfathered-in tax rates, but close a loophole that allows people to keep these low assessments even if the property isn't a principal residence (your heirs don't need to keep low rates on property they don't even live in). Also, starting in 2023, even protected tax rates would begin to rise at a rate equal to the California House Price Index.</li><li>• Some boring but good protections for family farms. To be honest, we don't feel like going into it.</li></ul> <p>Vote YES on Prop 19 and, we don't know, buy yourself an ice cream for having read all that.</p>



PROP	VOTE	WHY?
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**Makes changes to policies related to criminal sentencing, adding new crimes to the list of felonies, harsher sentencing rules, and new requirements around DNA collection.**

<p><b>20</b></p>	<p><b>NO.</b> Absolutely not.</p>	<p>How did this prop even wind up on the ballot? It's basically the opposite of what every person engaged in politics today wants – it's a law and order prop that would be more at home in a rambling Trump speech than the California code. As if criminal sentencing these days isn't problematic enough, this measure mandates even harsher sentencing for lower-level crimes like theft and adds new charges to the list of violent felonies that restrict parole. It would cost tens of millions of dollars, money that would be invested in the prison industrial complex instead of communities. It spends that money in the name of deterrence, a crime prevention strategy that just categorically does not work under any circumstances. This prop is, unsurprisingly, the work of police and prison guard unions and some law and order Republicans. Meanwhile, we're busy trying to CLOSE prisons in this state, not put more people behind bars.</p> <p>Don't buy into paranoia about what class of crime is or isn't considered a violent felony. This prop is a scam that would roll back some of the more effective criminal justice reforms Californians passed in recent years. It's, in a word, insane. It will be remembered as having been on the wrong side of history. Vote NO on Prop 20.</p>
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**Expands local governments' power to enact rent control policies.**

<p><b>21</b></p>	<p><b>YES,</b> w/ gusto!</p>	<p>If you know us at all, you know WE ARE VERY PRO RENT CONTROL, and you've probably had a chance to read about our thoughts on the matter because we voted on this exact prop in 2018. It didn't pass, not because it isn't a genius idea but because the opposition invested tons of money in nonsense-y ads maligning the glory of renter protections. Prop 21 would replace the 23-year old Costa-Hawkins Law, which bans local governments from enacting new rent control policies. With Costa-Hawkins gone, individual cities and counties could do fun things like expand rent control to buildings built after 1979, implement vacancy controls to limit how much landlords can raise the rent when a tenant moves out, and limit rent increases when the primary tenant leaves (i.e. if a spouse dies and the surviving person wasn't on the lease).</p> <p>We all know how out-of-control rents are, and many of us can't afford to buy in this state so we're stuck in a ballooning and often exploitive rental market. With the COVID crisis creating new and untold levels of housing instability everywhere, it's more important than ever that we protect people's access to stable housing. Plus, before you panic about all your future landlording wealth flying out the window, just know that this law doesn't actually legislate anything. It simply allows your community to make decisions about life in... your community. For 23 years, California cities haven't had the right to impose local tenant protection measures even when the community has deemed them necessary. This prop would change that!</p> <p>PRETTY PLEASE vote YES on 21!</p>
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PROP	VOTE	WHY?
<p><b>Provides ride-sharing, food delivery, and other gig economy apps special treatment under the state's worker protection laws, allowing their drivers to remain independent contractors and making other exceptions on their behalf.</b></p>		
<p><b>22</b></p>	<p><b>NO,</b> w/ gusto!</p>	<p>Our fury over this prop knows no bounds. Before we dive into what will most likely be a lengthy rant, let us just say throw your phone with its dumb in-app Uber advertising straight into a river and vote a very hearty NO, NO, NO, NO, #NO, #NEVER on this stupid prop.</p> <p>Now that that's out of our system, here's why you should not let the \$110 million+ (zoinks!) in advertising and the sad faces of one gazillion Uber drivers convince you to support this absurd measure: This policy is a ploy that blackmails an overleveraged, tenuously employed gig workforce into the service of protecting an inherently exploitative and dangerous business model designed to use and abuse their labor. California's legislature JUST passed a bill, AB 5, in September of 2019 to limit companies' ability to use contract labor, largely because of the exploitive practices of the ride-sharing, food-delivery, gig economy app world. Drivers may enjoy the flexibility of driving Uber or Lyft, but that doesn't change the fact that they are not being appropriately compensated for their work, and it's taxpayers who pick up the slack. Gig work is not a real job. It doesn't offer benefits. It doesn't offer a retirement program. It doesn't provide health insurance. Who pays when your Uber driver has no health insurance and gets injured? When Uber changes their employment policies arbitrarily and a bunch of drivers suddenly can't make ends meet? We do, the taxpayers of our great and generous state. Not to mention that this prop creates a loophole that other industries will absolutely exploit, so we'll be voting on special exemptions for large corporations who don't want to offer basic workplace protections until the end of time.</p> <p>And look, we know. We've gone on record blasting the SoCal taxi industry and local government for failing to take advantage of what is a huge public safety imperative (easy to access, safe transportation in a not-very-walkable city) and leaving the market open for these apps. But Uber and Lyft drivers are working under this model because they need work and money, like all of us. These companies should not get a special exemption from regulations that are designed to protect California workers just because they built their entire business on an unsustainable model that relies on problematic employment practices. That's a <i>them</i> problem, not an <i>us</i> problem.</p> <p>So, in conclusion, screw these assholes. Prop 22 is officially the most expensive prop ever propped because apparently all the money Lyft "can't afford" to pay their workers is being instead used to buy ads crying to us about how they are too broke to follow the law. Vote NO on Prop 22, and do it with a mischievous glimmer in your eye and a song in your heart.</p>



PROP	VOTE	WHY?
<b>Requires physician on-site at dialysis clinics and consent from the state for a clinic to close.</b>		
<b>23</b>	<p><b>NO,</b> but only b/c this prop specifically is dumb.</p> <p>A broader YES for sticking it to evil multi-billion- dollar dialysis companies.</p>	<p>Guys, if you loved Prop 8 back in 2018, then boy oh boy have we got a prop for you! That's right, you're going to really love Prop 23 because you'll once again have the chance to help mediate an expensive and confusing battle between unions and dialysis clinics. And guess what, you'll also get to relive the joy of watching commercials with sad-looking dialysis patients telling you that a yes vote will make you personally responsible for their immediate demise.</p> <p>Listen, this one is annoying. A yes vote forces a doctor to be on-site at every dialysis clinic. You might be wondering to yourself...man, am I the right person to be making medical staffing decisions about dialysis, which I know nothing about? Well, we are here to tell you the answer to that question is most certainly, NO! You are not! And neither are we. Which is why we're a soft "NO" on this one. Soft, because of course the 2 major billion-dollar corporations that run most of our state's dialysis clinics are awful (duh! We wrote about this in 2018), and we would certainly love their workers to be unionized. We'd vote yes on a prop that does that in a heartbeat. But unfortunately, that's not what this prop is.</p> <p>Listen, if you want to vote a vindictive yes on this just to stick it to a few privately-run corporations who are gouging people on healthcare costs, we are certainly not here to stand in your way. We might make a game-time decision to vote that way ourselves. But this prop is stupid, and frankly it shouldn't be on the ballot. Vote NO on Prop 23.</p> <p>And lastly, if someone comes around asking you to sign a petition to put a dialysis proposition on the ballot in 2022, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD PLEASE DON'T SIGN IT.</p>





PROP	VOTE	WHY?
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Expands the provisions of the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) and creates the California Privacy Protection Agency to implement and enforce the CCPA.

24

Eh, **NO.**

Remember back in Prop 14 when we railed against a real-estate developer personally funding a PPP™ (pet project proposition)? Well, here we go again. This story is almost too ridiculous to be true, but stay with us...you won't be disappointed. It all starts back in 2015 with Alastair Mactaggart (Cool! A Dickensian villain! Oh, wait, no, another Bay Area real estate developer). Alastair had an idea in the shower that Californians needed better consumer privacy protections, so he called up his neighbor Rick Arney and a lawyer/former CIA analyst, Mary Stone Ross, to help him write a ballot initiative. Did any of them have any background in data privacy? The tech industry? Writing legislation? No, No, and No. But as we know from the proposition system, being a rich person is really the only qualification one needs to put a cockamamie idea before tens of millions of California voters. Anyway, one of the provisions in Alastair's harebrained prop was that if the legislature wanted to make any future changes to the law it would need a 70% supermajority. SEVENTY PERCENT. This scared California State Senator Bob Hertzberg (SD-18) so much that he thought the best thing he could do was to call up ol' Ali Mactaggart and convince him to skip the ballot initiative and work on legislation with him. And much to everyone's surprise, that worked! The pair worked on legislation and Mactaggart pulled his prop. Soon after, the state legislature passed the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), the most ambitious consumer privacy law in the nation. From that point on, all of our online privacy issues were solved and we lived happily ever after! The End!

Wait, what's that you say? Oh right...this damn prop. Well, as it turns out, sometimes state legislatures don't write great legislation themselves. Sometimes, in fact, they write REALLY BAD legislation. Legislation that is so bad it doesn't even come close to doing what it's supposed to do. This is doubly true when they partner with non-experts to write it, and happens especially often with tech legislation. This will not surprise you if you watched those federal hearings where lawmakers did not know the difference between Facebook and Twitter when questioning Mark Zuckerberg, or if you follow Chuck Grassley on Twitter. Anyway, the legislation had too many loopholes, so now here we are with a prop that no one understands that attempts to fix all of the problems with the law. But does it?

There are people on all sides of this prop that we like and trust. Andrew Yang and U.S. Rep. Ro Khanna (CD-17) are for it, but many privacy advocacy groups are against it, as are the ACLU and Color of Change. The CA Democratic Party is, unhelpfully, neutral. Buried within are some great things that really will help consumers have more online privacy, so if that's your thing then we won't mind you voting yes. But there are some bad things too, like allowing businesses to charge you more money if you opt out of letting them sell your data. All this being said...this is another ridiculous prop that we shouldn't be voting on, and for that reason, we're a soft NO. Can't the state legislature just deal with its own mess?! Leave us out of it!! Vote NO on Prop 24.

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PROP	VOTE	WHY?
<b>Replaces cash bail with risk assessments for suspects awaiting trial.</b>		
<b>25</b>	<b>YES,</b> duh.	<p>Here's a fun thought experiment: Try and think of one good thing that cash bail accomplishes. Just one. Go ahead, we'll wait...</p> <p>No? Nothing? That's what we thought. Listen, cash bail would be evil even if it didn't also have such horrible racist implications. The system keeps hundreds of thousands of people incarcerated pre-trial, which is a fancy way of saying: incarcerated even though they haven't been convicted of anything. And if you can't pay cash bail, you're stuck! And because we know that Black and Latino/a people are more likely to be stopped and arrested, the population of those incarcerated pre-trial is disproportionately Black and Latino/a. And maybe you feel super #woke this year but it's actually been trending towards more disproportionate in recent years. We're moving in the wrong direction. Plus, once they're arrested, people of color often remain incarcerated because other racist structures mean they have less access to funds to pay their bail.</p> <p>We could seriously go on about how horrible cash bail is for days. We could tell you about how your health outcomes become more dire with every day you're incarcerated. How your long-term financial outcomes become worse with each passing day. We could tell you how in the middle of a freaking pandemic it might make more sense to not have our prisons overcrowded, risking the spread of coronavirus, just to house people who haven't been convicted of a crime before their trials. Seriously, we can do better.</p> <p>And guess what, California has already done better! Our state legislature passed a bill in 2018 that essentially eliminated the cash-bail system and gave judges the power to decide who would be a danger to the community if they were released pre-trial. So... why are we voting on this prop? Because the bail bond industry, which will be put out of business by this fantastico law, quickly gathered enough signatures to put a referendum on the ballot. Yes, this is a special type of proposition where voters are being asked to either approve or reject a law that was already passed by their elected legislators and signed by their elected governor. GTFOH! Prop 25 is an easy YES because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We wholeheartedly agreed that ending the cash bail system is the right thing to do.</li> <li>2. WE ALREADY PASSED THIS! WHY ARE WE BEING ASKED TO DO IT AGAIN?!?!?!?!?</li> </ol>