

# Tim Eyman's "advisory votes" are really push polls and should be abolished

A presentation by NPI's *Permanent Defense* project in support of Senate Bill 5224

# A quick history of “advisory votes”

- The “advisory votes” originated in 2007 with Initiative 960, which narrowly passed (51.24% yes vote) statewide.
- Nineteen separate “advisory votes” have appeared on the ballot to date, in seven different general elections.
- Although I-960 took effect in December 2007 (part of it was later struck down), the first “advisory votes” were not placed on the ballot until several years later, in 2012, because no one — not even Tim Eyman — remembered that they existed.

# Breaking down the “advisory votes”

## What voters see on their ballots

“The legislature extended, without a vote of the people...”	[prejudicial]
[Description of revenue source]	[context...?]
“... costing [\$_____ (amount over ten years)]...” <i>OR</i>	[misleading]
“... costing an amount that cannot currently be estimated...”	[confusing]
“... for government spending.”	[prejudicial]
“This tax increase should be:”	[dishonest]

“Repealed”

“Maintained”



“Repealed” shown first, violating the normal ballot answer dichotomy (Approve/Reject and Yes/No). “Maintained” is a weak word.

# Breaking down the “advisory votes”

## What voters do not see, and are not told

- That regardless of how they vote, their vote will not change what the Legislature did, contrary to what the answers imply;
- That the dollar figures are for a super long *ten year* period;
- What the actual reason was for the revenue increase (“for government spending” is not a reason);
- That the revenue increase was (in many cases) part of a budget approved by the Legislature, with funds appropriated for a purpose or set of purposes, e.g. transportation projects.

# What does an “advisory vote” look like?

## Advisory Votes

### Advisory Vote No. 10 Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1449

The legislature imposed, without a vote of the people, oil spill response and administration taxes to apply to crude oil or petroleum products transported by railroad, costing \$17,000,000, for government spending.

This tax increase should be:

- Repealed
- Maintained

To the right is one of the nineteen “advisory votes”. This is the tenth one, which appeared on the November 2015 ballot. The “wrapper” surrounding the bogus ten year cost data is always the same (“the Legislature imposed, without a vote of the people... [an amount]... for government spending.” Then it falsely asks if the tax increase should be “Repealed” or “Maintained”.

The “advisory votes” violate the cardinal principle of gathering good data... **purposely.**

# If the questions are bad, then the answers will be equally worthless

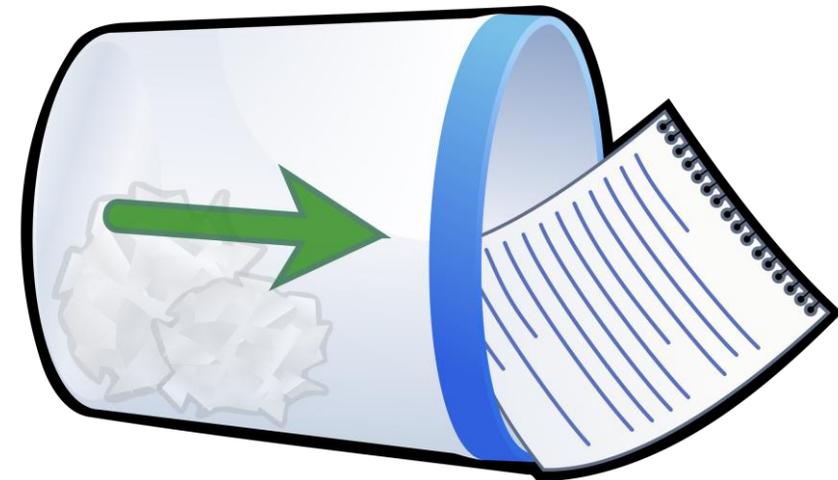
In the information technology world, this concept is known as ***garbage in, garbage out.***

OR: Sloppily programmed inputs = incorrect outputs.

**Garbage in?**



**Garbage out!**



# The “advisory votes” exist to influence public opinion, not to measure it

To add a new candidate, fill in the oval next to the write-in line and print the name on the write-in line.

**Always look at both sides of your ballot.**

Do not cut, tear or damage the ballot.

Advisory Votes	
<b>Advisory Vote No. 10</b> <b>Engrossed Substitute</b> <b>House Bill 1449</b>  The legislature imposed, without a vote of the people, oil spill response and administration taxes to apply to crude oil or petroleum products transported by railroad, costing \$17,000,000, for government spending.  This tax increase should be: <input type="radio"/> Repealed <input type="radio"/> Maintained	youth development, the health and well-being of communities; and crisis prevention and early intervention for children and youth, including for domestic violence and homelessness. The measure would authorize an additional regulation per \$1,000 of collection by authorized of 3% in the Should this p <input type="radio"/> Approved <input type="radio"/> Rejected
<b>Advisory Vote No. 11</b> <b>Second Substitute Senate Bill 5052</b>  The legislature imposed, without a vote of the people, the marijuana excise tax on medical marijuana sales, costing an amount that cannot currently be estimated, for government spending.  This tax increase should be: <input type="radio"/> Repealed <input type="radio"/> Maintained	<b>Assessor</b> nonpartisan office vote for one <input type="radio"/> Lloyd Hara <input type="radio"/> John Wilson <input type="radio"/>
<b>Advisory Vote No. 12</b> <b>Second Engrossed Substitute</b> <b>Senate Bill 5987</b>  The legislature imposed, without a vote of the people, additional taxes on motor vehicle and special fuels costing an estimated \$3,707,000,000 in the first ten years, for government spending.  This tax increase should be: <input type="radio"/> Repealed <input type="radio"/> Maintained	<b>Director of Elections</b> nonpartisan office vote for one <input type="radio"/> Julie Wise <input type="radio"/> Zack Hudgins <input type="radio"/>
<b>Advisory Vote No. 13</b> <b>Engrossed Substitute</b> <b>Senate Bill 6138</b>  The legislature increased business and occupation tax revenues and excluded certain software manufacturers from a retail sales tax exception, without a vote of the people, costing \$1,449,000,000 for government spending.  This tax increase should be: <input type="radio"/> Repealed <input type="radio"/> Maintained	<b>Metropolitan King County Council District No. 8</b> nonpartisan office vote for one <input type="radio"/> Joe McDermott <input type="radio"/>
	<b>Court of Appeals, Division No. 1, District No. 1</b>  <b>Judge Position No. 3</b> nonpartisan office vote for one <input type="radio"/> James Verellen <input type="radio"/>
	<b>Port of Seattle</b>  <b>Commissioner Position No. 2</b> nonpartisan office vote for one <input type="radio"/> Court <input type="radio"/> G <input type="radio"/>
	<b>Commissioner</b> nonpartisan office vote for one <input type="radio"/> Fred Felleman <input type="radio"/> Maden Yeoh

Check out the space being taken up by the “advisory votes” on this November 2015 King County general election ballot. Contests actually being decided by voters that could have appeared on the front of the ballot were forced to the back instead. This “ballot clutter” is *not* a bug... **it’s a feature.**

# “Advisory votes” are akin to push polls

## What is a push poll?

“A *push poll* is a nefarious telemarketing technique designed to spread negative information about an opposition candidate. During the South Carolina primary of 2000, a caller from the George W. Bush campaign asked 300 potential voters:

*John McCain calls the campaign finance system corrupt, but as chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, he raises money and travels on the private jets of corporations with legislative proposals before his committee. In view of this, are you much more likely to vote for him... or much more likely to vote against him?*

A push poll is not a legitimate public opinion survey because its purpose is not to obtain an opinion but to influence it, which qualifies the device as a *dirty trick*.”

— From the *Dirty tricks* entry of *Safire’s Political Dictionary*, 2008 edition

Oxford University Press | New York, New York

# “Advisory votes” vs. conventional push polls



**To the left below** is the text of the last “advisory vote”. **To the right** is a mock script using some of the language from that same “advisory vote” to demonstrate what a conventional tele push poll looks and sounds like.

The legislature expanded, without a vote of the people, the oil spill response and administration taxes to crude oil or petroleum products received by pipeline, costing \$13,000,000 over ten years for government spending. This tax increase should be:

- Repealed
- Maintained

Last session, Senator John Doe voted to raise oil spill and response taxes by thirteen million dollars, increasing government spending, without a vote of the people. Having heard this information, do you think that in the upcoming election, Senator John Doe should be:

- Replaced with someone better
- Returned to the Legislature

# “Advisory votes” violate the basic guidelines for asking unbiased questions



- 1. First Guideline:** Do not introduce ideas or opinions that will influence responses.
- 2. Second Guideline:** Make sure that no answer choice is more loaded than any other.
- 3. Third Guideline:** Make clear that either a positive or a negative answer is equally acceptable.

— David F. Harris

*The Complete Guide to Writing Questionnaires*, Chapter 9  
I&M Press | Durham, North Carolina

# Even if you have an agenda, you should want to ask unbiased questions!



- Otherwise, you get bad data. (Garbage in, garbage out!)
- If the objective is to *influence* public opinion as opposed to actually *measuring* it, then biased language is great! The more loaded the question is, the better. The more prompted the respondent is to pick a particular response, the better.
- Washington State should not be in the business of conducting polls of any sort, let alone *push polls*. Elections are a public service that costs money. Elections should have meaning.

# In conclusion...

- “Advisory votes” are **bad** public policy because they are totally meaningless. They have no effect regardless of how people vote. And that is by design: they’re intended to *influence* public opinion, not *measure* it. “Advisory votes” are an unacceptable use of our tax dollars and must be repealed.
- Persons or organizations who are interested in influencing public opinion can pay for their own push polls and mass communications. Taxpayers should not be footing the bill for anti-tax communiques dressed up as plebiscites.