Yes on Prop. 30: Tax the wealthy, save education!

It’s make-or-break time for California’s universities and schools. After years of cuts, California’s public schools, universities and local public safety services are at the point of no return.

Citizens groups, labor unions and Governor Jerry Brown crafted Proposition 30, the “Schools and Local Public Safety Protection Act,” to raise needed revenue in a way that is fair and sustainable.

Prop. 30 would increase income taxes only on those making more than $250,000. Taxes would increase 1% for those making $250,000–$400,000, 2% for those above $300,000, and 3% for those earning more than $500,000. It also raises the state sales tax by 1/4 of one percent. In other words, for every $100 spent, the increase would amount to a single quarter.

Measure prevents $250 million in UC “trigger cuts”

“Proposition 30 is fair,” said Gov. Brown recently, “because those who have done extraordinarily well beyond the imaginations of most people, are asked to give back a very small amount through an income tax hike.”

If it passes, Proposition 30 will raise $9 billion in the first year and $6 billion a year for six years after-ward. Six out of every seven dollars it raises will come from those making above $250,000 a year.

If Proposition 30 fails, automatic “trigger cuts” will kick in, amounting to $6 billion statewide. The trigger cuts would chop $250 million more from UC and CSU – cuts neither institution can afford.

Once renowned for world-class education, California now ranks 47th in per-pupil funding. Public safety personnel, like firefighters and police have been taken off the streets. The cuts have hurt California’s middle-class, working families, children and college students the most. “Californians cannot keep cutting their schools, universities and public safety and expect our economy to grow,” said Lisa Kermish, UPTE’s vice president. “We need to invest in our future.”

The best course: Prop. 30

Prop. 30 is the only initiative that will protect school and safety funding, while addressing the state’s chronic budget problems. Its funding will go towards things like smaller class sizes, updated textbooks and rehearing teachers. It will make sure adequate public safety cannot be cut without voter approval. And it will help pay down the state’s debt—built up by years of gimmicks and borrowing.

A competing measure, Proposition 38, was placed on the ballot by multi-millionaire Molly Munger, who has also bankrolled most of the $28.3 million in that campaign’s coffers. Prop. 38 promises to raise billions for schools, but that revenue wouldn’t be available until after 2013 – too late to avoid the devastating trigger cuts to education.

If both measures are approved, the one with the most votes will take effect. If the highest vote-getter is Prop. 38, the trigger cuts will still kick in, even if Prop. 30 also receives more than 50%.

Many labor unions, including UPTE, have endorsed Prop. 30. It also has the backing of the UC regents, and a long list of educational institutions, newspapers, and community groups.

Vote NO on deceptive Prop. 32

Proposition 32, a measure appearing on California’s November statewide ballot, is not what it seems. While it claims to be about “stopping special interests” the measure actually gives special exemptions to corporate special interests and super PACs. It would give even more power to the wealthy and well-connected to influence elections, control government and weaken our state’s middle class.

The millionaire backers misleadingly call it “The Stop Special Interest Money Now Act,” claiming it would rein in campaign contributions by both unions and corporations. In fact, the deceptive wording of the initiative specifically limits the voices of union members, like teachers, nurses, health care workers, firefighters, and UPTE members.

Phony fairness, real exemptions

Prop. 32 was written to limit the voice of union workers and create special exemptions for corporate interests, giving the wealthy and well-connected even more political power to write their own set of rules. While it ostensibly prohibits both unions and corporations from using voluntary payroll deductions to raise campaign contributions, in fact unions use that method to raise money. Corporations raise their political contributions from profits, while billionaires pull them from their own pockets – and Prop. 32 imposes no restrictions on those sources.

Prop. 32 also exempts secretive super PACs and corporate front groups, which can raise unlimited amounts of money from corporate special interests and billionaires. The measure does nothing to prevent anonymous donors from spending unlimited amounts to influence elections.

Prop. 32 is not campaign finance reform. Instead of “getting special interest money out of politics,” the measure does nothing to prevent corporate CEOs and their lobbyists even greater influence over our political system.

Corporations already over-spend unions 15-1 in politics. This measure would effectively clear the playing field of any opposition to big corporations’ agenda, which includes outsourcing jobs, gutting homeowner protections, slashing wages and health benefits and attacking retirement security.

Opposition widespread

Non-partisan groups like the California League of Women Voters, California Common Cause, Public Citizen and Public Campaign, who advocate for policies that curb special interest influence, are urging voters to vote “no” on Prop. 32. Public Citizen calls it “an attack on labor masquerading as campaign finance reform.” California Common Cause says it “will do more harm to California’s democracy than good.”

Newspapers across the state have lined up in opposition to the proposition and join many prominent public figures in denouncing Prop. 32, including Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and United Farmworkers leader and former UC regent Dolores Huerta.

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Art Pulaski, head of the California Labor Federation and Larry Cohen, president of the Communications Workers of America, know that Proposition 30 will stave off a $250 million cut to the UC system and a 20% increase in student tuition.
UPTE activists and their colleagues in the Communications Workers of America District 9 came together to take a stand on one of the most deceptive measures on the California ballot this November: Proposition 32. UPTE-CWA urges a "no" vote on this measure, which is being funded with millions of dollars of out-of-state corporate money (see stories on page 1 and 4).

CSU executive pay under fire

As students in the California State University system prepare for a possible 5% tuition hike, executive pay is coming under increasing criticism.

The average base pay for CSU presidents (the equivalent of UC campus chancellors) is $298,000, according to an October 6 analysis by the Contra Costa Times. Incoming CSU chancellor Tim White will receive more than $450,000 (and that is quite a bit less than his UC counterpart, Mark Yudof, who weighs in at $581,232 – the top salary among public university presidents in California).

At the same time, university priorities are favoring executives, relentless budget cuts and short-sighted public policies are grinding California’s higher education system to bits, argues Andy Kroll in an analysis by the Contra Costa Times. Incoming CSU chancellor Tim White will receive more than $450,000 (and that is quite a bit less than his UC counterpart, Mark Yudof, who weighs in at $581,232 – the top salary among public university presidents in California).

Alongside the chancellor’s salary is the $110,320 cut he saw when he was promoted to UCOP president in 2010. The UC Regents gave him a large raise this summer, but the $298,000 pay hike could have been a 10% raise instead. There was an additional 1.5% to UCRP that everyone else started paying in July, and it dropped its insistence on a short-term contract with an expiration date that was in sync with those of other bargaining units. UCOP’s response, however, was to decree that no one will get any wage increases, including equity increases or reclassifies, until the pension issue is resolved.

The medical centers have stated they have money and want to give raises to the HX unit members, but UCOP won’t approve the requests.

“UC’S goal: two-tier pension

UC has proposed creating a two-tier system that would make employees pay more for ultimately fewer benefits: raise the minimum retirement age; raise the age for the maximum retirement benefit; cut some benefit payouts, and eliminate spouse survivor benefits. The proposal would force all new employees onto the lesser retiree health program, and weaken the pension system for all employees, current and future. UPTE has insisted on its right to negotiate over the pension plan and has been working with other campus unions, including AFSCME and CNA, to develop a sustainable and fair counter-proposal.

Union proposes immediate 3.5% pay increase

In the meantime, UPTE proposed that every HX member receive an immediate 3.5% wage increase that has been held up by the stalled negotiations. UPTE’s proposal would have addressed salary needs of Dieticians and Senior Dietitians, who recently joined the HX unit but have not seen a wage increase or been placed on a step system. UPTE also offered compromises by which HX employees would begin contributing an additional 1.5% to UCRP that everyone else started paying in July, and it dropped its

UPTE’s health care professionals vote overwhelmingly to strike

Anny that UC is using pay increases in an attempt to force UPTE to concede to UC’s standard two-tier pension plan, members of the health care professionals (HX) unit voted overwhelmingly in early October to authorize UPTE to call a strike if and when it is needed. Negotiations for this unit have been bogged down since the spring due to UC’s refusal to provide wage increases as long as no agreement existed for its two-tier pension and reduced retiree health care proposals for 2013. UPTE bargainers have repeatedly stated that the union will not accept UC’s 2013 pension and health care take-aways.

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Privatization worries at UCSF

At the beginning of 2012, UCSF chancellor Susan Desmond-Hellman proposed that “a small working group be formed to help UCSF explore options to secure its financial future” – a proposal that many saw as the harbinger of privatization of UCSF. That working group received its go-ahead from the regents this month. UCSF’s “options to secure its financial future” also include a partnership with Big Pharma. UCSF is the first school to get a partnership with Pfizer, worth up to $85 million over 5 years – leading to concerns among observers over the increasingly blurred line between academic freedom and commercialization of public universities.

UCD techs speak up for safe working conditions

What do unions do? They don’t just bargain better wages; they watch out for the health and safety of workers.

A group of animal techs at UC Davis was working under extreme heat conditions in the cage-washing areas, with temperatures reaching 118 degrees and higher. UPTE zone contact Guy Martin, local president Edgardo Vasquez, and health and safety committee member Lucy Joseph notified labor relations, EH&S and Cal OSHA about the conditions. In response, management installed cooling fans, misters, and cooling stations.

UPTE members at UCSF, Carolan Buckmaster and James Lear, fill out a bargaining survey for researcher (RX) and tech (TX) members. The survey gives direction to our elected bargaining team as it prepares for negotiations for a new contract.

UPTE's health care professionals vote overwhelmingly to strike
Health & safety notes
by Joan Lichterman

The National Economic and Social Rights Initiative and the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health have launched a Workers’ Comp Hub (<www.workerscomphub.org>) to provide basic information for injured and ill workers in all 50 states and help in navigating the complex workers’ compensation system; provide resources and tools for advocacy and action; as well as a platform for sharing strategies and solutions.

Workers, policymakers, academicians and others will be invited to share strategies to meet the needs of injured and ill workers. To share resources and tools, as well as suggest events and actions, send an email to “info@workerscomphub.org”.

Help build the ChemHAT internet database
ChemHAT is a new internet database designed by workers for workers to provide easy-to-use information to protect ourselves, our families and our co-workers from the harm that chemicals can cause.

Instead of focusing on what engineering controls and personal protective equipment are needed to take proactive action, ChemHAT is being designed to answer the question, “Is there a way to get this job done without using dangerous chemicals?”

The answer can often be “yes,” based on stories of substitution and elimination that already exist. Where information on safer alternatives isn’t available, the ChemHAT team invites you, the users of ChemHAT, to help find or create that information by identifying stories of safer substitutions for dangerous chemicals.

ChemHAT’s designers hope the next version will include information on the top ten or more chemicals of greatest concern in your workplace or industry, and safer alternatives to those chemicals, including information on their cost and availability. If you’re interested in helping build safer alternatives information for ChemHAT, please send a message through <www.chemhat.org/contact>.

ChemHAT is a joint project of IUE-CWA and the BlueGreen Alliance, with the support of United Steelworkers, Pharos, the Tony Mazzocchi Center, and CWA District 9.

Joan Lichterman is UPTE’s health and safety director. She recently retired from her career at UC Berkeley as an editor.

Come one, come all, to UPTE’s convention
UPTE’s annual convention will take place November 10-12 (Veterans Day weekend) at the Hilton Garden Inn in Emeryville—a few miles from Berkeley, and easily accessible by public transportation.

All UPTE members are welcome to attend. Each UPTE local has elected rank-and-file delegates to represent them at the meeting. Activities range from policy discussions and formal votes on the direction of the union, to seminars, workshops and recreational events.

UPTE health & safety workshop
The first day of the UPTE Convention (Saturday, 11/10) will include an interactive workshop led by Rita Kern (UCLA) and Joan Lichterman (UPTE health & safety director) focusing on the relationship between work, life and health. It will include training on identifying and deciding actions members can take to improve working conditions.

Saturday night at 8 pm convention attendees will have the option to attend a musical on the UC Berkeley campus called “Woody Guthrie’s American Song.” Guthrie witnessed the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl migrations, and a world war, and turned his experiences into legendary songs about the beauty and struggles of this country.

On Sunday evening, beginning at 7 pm, activities will include an awards dinner, a performance by the Labor Heritage/Rockin’ Solidarity Chorus, and a bingo fundraiser for the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation. All events are at the Hilton Garden Inn in Emeryville. Contact your local or UPTE systemwide for more details.

Voices of the union
Why administrative professionals are saying “yes” to union representation

“Every day thousands of administrative professionals do essential work that allows UC to carry out its stated mission. In recent years, however, UC has allowed our wages to stagnate and has failed to include us in discussions about important changes being made to the university. A union will give us a voice, allowing us to not only share our demands, but also our collective knowledge and expertise with the UC leadership.” – Mark Pabst, Analyst IV, UCSF

“Administrative professionals need a union because we need a voice so we can speak up for ourselves. If we don’t, who will?” – Susan Orlofsky, Senior Editor, UCSD

“I support UPTE for administrative professionals because we need a voice to negotiate our contracts for better pay, to protect our benefits and increase our job security.” – Sue Cross, Sr. Learning Skills Counselor, UC Irvine

“APs need a voice for wages, working conditions and benefits. We currently have no say.” – Steve Schmidhauser, Programmer/Analyst, UCLA

“I started here a long time ago and held different positions—some union, some not. Generally if you’re in the union you get regular pay raises and the protection the union offers. That being said, UC management has a harder time exploiting your position and talents that you bring to the workplace.” – David Bozo, Programmer Analyst I, UCSF

“Administrative Analysts have been unrepresented for too long. It is important that we now have a seat and a say at the negotiation table. Many of us have been at the same pay scale, with no raise or reclassification for years. One voice is not heard as loud as a group voice—a union is needed to do that.” – Diana Sansoe, Admin Analyst II, UCSF

Are you (or do you know) an administrative professional who hasn’t yet signed an UPTE card? Please visit <apsforupte.org> or call (888)740-8783.

Attention: UC administrative professionals!
It’s October: Do you know where your raises are?

Are you getting a raise this month? Thousands of UC research and technical staff will, thanks to the contract those groups negotiated after joining UPTE.

Effective Oct. 1, salaries of these UPTE-represented staff have increased by 3%. And in January, thousands of these employees will receive additional step increases that average 2%.

What do these employees have that 16,000 UC administrative professionals don’t? They formed a union—a legal entity that requires the university to sit down and bargain with them over hours, wages and working conditions.

Think that having a union contract doesn’t make a difference?
When money is tight, front-line employees need a seat at the table. If Proposition 30 does not pass in November, the situation for employees and students will reach the critical stage.

Employees with union representation will be able to advocate for the students, academic programs, research, and public services that we support. For everyone else, UC will decide.

When employees join together to make our voices heard, we choose to make ourselves—and the mission of the university—a top priority. Without a union, we get what little may be left.

If you or a co-worker haven’t yet signed an authorization card saying that you support UPTE for administrative professional employees, now is the time. If you want more information (including a list of job titles eligible to sign), please visit <www.apsforupte.org> or email “aps@upte-cwa.org”. Check us out on Facebook too: search for “APs for UPTE.”
In the news

UPTE investigates pension options

A coalition that includes UPTE-CWA, AFSCME and the California Nurses Association have met with actuaries to evaluate UC’s cost estimates for funding the University of California Retirement Plan and prepare alternative proposals.

UC wants to institute a two-tier system starting in July, 2013. The university would force two groups of workers onto the sub-standard plan: new employees hired after its inception, plus current employees whose age plus years of service don’t total at least 50.

While other employees won’t be forced on to the plan, UC will raise the company’s poor wages and retaliation against workers.

Walmart workers have had enough

Walmart, the world’s largest employer and among the most anti-union, has seen strikes by its employees at warehouse and retail centers across the country -- the first in Walmart’s 50-year history. In late September, workers in Los Angeles went on strike. They were joined days later in a second strike by Walmart workers in 28 locations across 12 states, including Dallas, Miami, Seattle and Northern, Central, and Southern California.

Six hundred supporters in Illinois blocked a Walmart warehouse to protest the company’s poor wages and retaliation against workers.

For details, visit the independent journal Labor Notes <www.labornotes.org>.

Information key to fightback

“These specialized, independent ‘bean-counters’ will help the unions figure out how much money is needed in our pension fund to pay anticipated benefits,” said UPTE’s president Jelger Kalmijn in a bulletin to workers earlier this month. “This union analysis will be crucial in fighting UC’s push for an inferior two-tier pension system.”

In its effort to force the unions to agree to its two-tier plan, UC is holding UPTE’s health care professionals’ wages hostage and refusing to give time-off for bargaining to elected AFSCME team members. In response, campus unions are developing joint education and action plans.

Out-of-state Super PAC pays millions to kill Prop. 30 and pass Prop. 32

In late October, the Sacramento Bee and other newspapers revealed that a shadowy Phoenix-based group, the Americans for Responsible Leadership (ARL), gave $11 million to the Small Business Action Committee PAC to be spent opposing Prop. 30 and supporting the anti-union Prop. 32.

“Californiaans should ask why a secretive group from Arizona is swooping into California and spending millions to sway elections,” said No on Proposition 32 chairman Lou Paulson. “A deceptive initiative masquerading as ’campaign reform’ that claims to ’stop special interest money’ is hiding behind $15 million in out-of-state contributions,” said Paulson.

Funders have ties to the right-wing Koch brothers

The campaign supporting Proposition 32 has also benefited from at least $15 million in completely anonymous funding. In September, newspapers revealed that another front group, the California Future Fund, has ties to the notorious Koch brothers and contributed $4 million to the pro-Prop. 32 campaign.

ARL was formed as a non-profit in Arizona and states on its website that it seeks to promote “accountability, transparency, ethics, and related public policy issues.” This transparency doesn’t extend to its own operations, as it has not reported its donors in either that state or California. Donations to the Small Business PAC now total more than $29 million.

The nonprofit public interest group Common Cause has filed a lawsuit against this donation based on its opaque funding sources.