



ICYMI: “Misleading,” “Dubious,” and “Duping People” -- How Opponents of Schools & Communities First Initiative are Trying to Fool Voters [LA Times]

Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association already resorting to shady tactics

Schools and Communities First exempts all residential property, maintains protections for homeowners

In case you missed it, the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association was called out in the *Los Angeles Times* for “misleading” voters and “duping people” with “dubious” campaign mailers. These desperate tactics by the opposition of the Schools & Communities First initiative shows how far the special interests will go to maintain a system that prioritizes corporations over schools and communities.

Los Angeles Times: [Column: Junk mail disguised as official correspondence — how is this legal?](#)

David Lazarus

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Somewhere between the constitutional right to free speech and California’s law against unfair business practices reside all those mailers we receive that look like official government correspondence but turn out to be sales pitches or requests for money.

It’s an all-too-common ploy on the part of businesses and organizations, intended to prompt (or trick) people into opening junk mail by making it appear to be something it’s not.

A recent example of this **dubious practice** was shared with me by Beaumont City Clerk Steve Mehlman, who received what seemed to be an official warning from state authorities that his property tax may be about to go up.

“ENCLOSED: Notification of Property Tax Increases Affecting Homeowners in Beaumont,” the envelope says. “Estimates of Addressee’s Property Tax Increase.”

In big bold letters it declares, “MONITORED DELIVERY: 0904-001,” which sounds ominous.

The envelope says Mehlman has just three days to “complete and return the enclosed registered document.”

“IMPORTANT: Any delay abets planned increases in per-parcel taxes and homeowner bond debt.”
Abets!

The back of the envelope says “HAND-DELIVER ONLY,” which is how all mail is delivered.

It's only if you spot the fine print at the bottom of the back of the envelope that you learn the letter isn't from the local tax assessor's office. **It's from the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assn.**

In case you don't know, those are the guys who are [sworn to defend](#) at all costs California's Prop. 13, which limits residential and commercial property tax revenue, thus **keeping the state in a perpetual state of budgetary turmoil.**

Within the envelope is a letter warning that "overspending politicians plan to take Prop. 13 apart," and a petition calling on state lawmakers to "reject any legislation that will weaken, revoke or repeal" Prop. 13.

There's a chart purporting to show how much Beaumont homeowners have saved in property taxes thanks to Prop. 13, but nothing specific about Mehlman's home.

Then comes a "membership acceptance" form committing him to contribute at least \$15 to the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assn.

"I think I know a misleading mailer when I see one," said Mehlman, 76, who worked for AARP before becoming a Beaumont [municipal official](#).

Misleading, perhaps, but likely not illegal.

[...]

Yeah, but isn't there a chance recipients, particularly seniors, will be misled by the scary-looking envelope, which suggests your property tax is going up?

[...]

Over the last 40 years, though, Prop. 13 has been the poster child for the law of unintended consequences, forcing lawmakers to come up with [elaborate work-arounds](#) to keep government programs funded.

An initiative is [expected to qualify](#) for the November 2020 ballot that would keep safeguards for residential properties intact but roll back strict limitations on taxing commercial properties — what's known in tax circles as a "split roll."

[...]

Coupal said his group opposes a split roll. **I support the idea.**

When most people think of Prop. 13, they think of sweet, gray-haired grannies being protected from losing a roof over their head because they can't afford sky-high property taxes.

What they tend not to consider is the fact that **many commercial properties haven't seen a meaningful tax hike in decades because Prop. 13 allows for reassessments mainly when a property changes hands.**

But that's a topic for another day. For the moment, let's focus on mailers and how we can rein in the practice of **duping people** into believing the letter in their hand isn't junk mail.

The mailer from the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assn. may not run afoul of the law but, to my mind, **it doesn't pass the smell test.**

[...]

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For additional information, please contact:
Alex Stack, Schools & Communities First Communications Director
Cell: (603) 320-0398