

Oklahoma Ballot Questions

Voters in Oklahoma answer these ballot questions:

HUMAN SERVICES

Oklahoma voters have approved a measure to restructure the state's troubled human services department. Supporters say it will add accountability to a department that has struggled with a string of child neglect cases and a class-action lawsuit in recent years. The measure abolishes the title of the agency, its board of commissioners and its ability to set policy. It shifts oversight and power to the governor's office, which will appoint the agency's director with the consent of the Oklahoma Senate. Opponents of the measure say it goes too far in trying to right the agency's past mistakes. But Gov. Mary Fallin has said the measure will complement Oklahoma's Pinnacle Plan, a \$153 million blueprint for overhauling the foster care system over the next five years.

OKLAHOMA PAROLE BOARD

Oklahoma voters have approved a proposal to take the governor out of the pardon and parole process for nonviolent offenders. The proposal was among six state questions decided in statewide balloting Tuesday. Under the proposal, the Oklahoma Constitution will be amended to increase the power and authority of the state Pardon and Parole Board. It will remove the governor from the pardon and parole process for people convicted of nonviolent offenses and grant that authority solely to the board. Opponents say the change will erode accountability, while supporters say it will streamline the early parole process for nonviolent offenders. The governor will still be involved in the parole process for violent offenders.

OKLAHOMA-AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Oklahoma voters have approved a Republican-backed measure that wipes out all affirmative action programs in state government hiring, education and contracting practices. Voters approved the new constitutional amendment Tuesday despite opponents, who claimed there already was a prohibition on racial or gender quotas in state government. The GOP-controlled Legislature voted in 2011 to send the proposal to a vote of the people. It did so over the objection of Democrats who maintained it was designed only to stoke racial tensions and drive conservative voters to the polls. The Republican sponsors of the bill disputed that claim. They say the amendment's purpose is to help the state get past racism by showing that a person's qualifications are more important than skin color.

OKLAHOMA PROPERTY TAX

Oklahoma voters have approved a constitutional amendment that limits the yearly increase in some property taxes to 3 percent. The amendment's passage Tuesday means the maximum increase will be lowered from 5 percent. It goes into effect Jan. 1 and only applies to homestead exempted property and agricultural land. Supporters say limiting the increase to 3 percent yearly will reduce financial hardships on homeowners, particularly those on fixed incomes. Opponents argued the limit would primarily benefit the wealthy and would result in a loss of revenue for schools, libraries, local governments, the career-tech system and state-funded health services

Associated Press