

Earl Raab

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PERVERTING PROPOSITION 13

Suppose you were 68 years old, with an income of \$307.60 per month. If you're lucky, you might find a barely liveable room, with utilities, for, say, \$135 a month. You can also figure that it will cost you about \$2.50 a day to pay for those miscellaneous items that will make life barely liveable: an occasional pair of socks, tube of toothpaste, bottle of aspirin, newspaper, perhaps even a rare movie.

That will leave you \$3.17 a day for food. Now, that can also be called barely liveable. You won't starve to death. You're probably 75 cents away from even suffering from malnutrition, if you're careful. But all those "barely-liveables" add up to daily struggle and one big misery.

Then you're told that your marginal purchasing power is going to be *reduced* in the coming year.

That is exactly what some of our public officials are proposing for thousands of *unemployable* Californians who are on welfare: aged, blind, disabled, young children. Our Governor is proposing a 6 per cent increase in the welfare grants for these unemployables, which is much less than the rise in living costs, and even less than the President's guide-lines for wage increases.

Some might call this proposal heartless. Some might refer to the callous uses of political ambition. Assembly Speaker Leo McCarthy calls it "unthinkable." But it is also a most remarkable mis-reading of Proposition 13.

Government expenditures have to be cut, and not just because taxes are high. Runaway government expenditures are the main cause of inflation. Inflation is a frightening

Earl Raab
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page 2

word not just to the consumer, but to anyone who is concerned about political stability in this country.

However, the main victim of inflation is always the poor. There are fewer places the poor can cut down without cutting to the quick. It is always astonishing to hear champions of the poor call indiscriminately for more taxes and more government expenditure. With such friends, the poor need no enemies.

Proposition 13 was a demand that government cut expenditures. But it was not a demand that government cut indiscriminately. That would be evident to anyone who took the trouble to read the opinion surveys of those who voted for Proposition 13. They were voting against waste in government. They were voting against the bureaucrats. They were not voting against the poor.

Certainly Californians were not voting to cut these pitiful direct payments to the indigent old, blind and disabled. They might have been more amenable to cutting the staff that administers the program, which staff they assume is larger than it needs to be. They might have been open to cutting other social programs which are bearing little fruit. They would clearly have been pleased if the politicians had taken a zero-budgeting approach to many of the government's agencies and programs, to seriously examine where all the costly deadwood might be. But direct payments to the unemployable needy is the least wasteful and least bureaucratic program a government can conduct.

To reduce that income would be a clear perversion of the intent of the public in voting for Proposition 13. Whether that perversion is proposed out of ignorance, or out of cynicism, it is now up to the public to make itself clear to the politicians.