

Help! Prison officials take up cry for Proposal E

By TIM RICHARD

"Help," say state prison officials as they ask for voter approval Tuesday of Proposal E.

"It's a hypocritical proposal on the part of the state legislature," answers Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, who says he'll vote no on E. Proposal E is the only state tax increase on the ballot. It asks that the income tax be hiked one-tenth of 1 percent for five years (to 4.7 percent from 4.6 percent) with the money being earmarked for prison construction and programs.

TO TAXPAYERS, passage of Proposal E would mean an average increase of \$11.85 per person a year.

To the state, it would mean an estimated \$275 million to \$360 million, depending on the health of the economy, over the tax hike's five-year life.

(To which Patterson retorts: "There's no such thing as a temporary tax.")

Proposal E revenues would buy:

- Four regional prisons of 550 beds each for \$132 million.
- Demolition by 1990 of the 100-year-old state reformatory in Ionia, a facility described by corrections officials as "antiquated and overcrowded. . . (It) houses young offenders in conditions which are the worst in the prison system."



L. BROOKS PATTERSON

• Improved county jails, lockups and other facilities as determined by the legislature.

MIKE SMALE, school principal of the new Huron Valley women's prison in Ypsilanti, made the case for Proposal E to a Schoolcraft College audience. "Our prisons today are 1,500 to 1,600 over capacity. Seventy percent of the bed space is substandard. The prison population has doubled since 1973."

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How did prisons get so crowded? Smale gave four answers:

"In the 1970s, serious violent crime increased. There was a very angry, righteous, public demand for action. In 1970 the average prison sentence was 22 months. Today it is 32 months. There are 15,000 persons in prison today."

"Good time" was eliminated by the voters in 1978. This will add 2,600 persons to the prison population." The so-called "good time" allowed a prisoner to be released in less than the minimum-sentence imposed by the court if

he/she behaved. Elimination of good time required a prisoner to serve his/her full minimum sentence.

"The firearms law tacked two years onto a prison sentence for a crime committed with a gun. That added 500 to the prison population."

"The number of women in the prison population has tripled in the last 10 years. It used to be that if a man and woman committed a bank robbery, the man got 30 years and the woman five. Today the judge gives them both 30 years," said Smale.

He added that federal courts are now protecting prisoners' rights to adequate prison conditions if the state fails to run prisons properly. "I hope we won't allow a court to impose its solutions on us."

PATTERSON, in an interview, had no argument over the number of persons in prisons. In fact, he led the 1978 petition drive to eliminate "good time."

But the Oakland prosecutor argued that the legislature should have found the money it needed within the existing state general-fund budget. Instead, lawmakers spotted a program they figured would be popular — prisons — and dumped on the State Corrections Department the job of selling it to the public.

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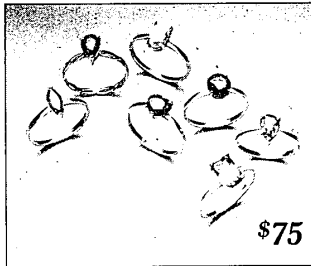
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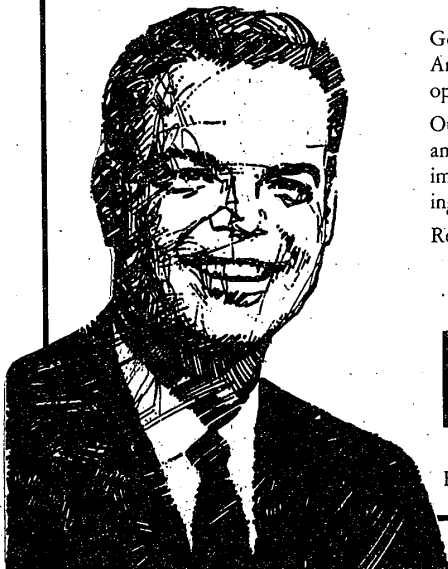
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