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About Those Three Proposals on Tuesday's NY Ballot

New Yorkers on Tuesday are voting on three proposals that could turn out to have long-term impact – and there are some strong opinions on two of them.

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New Yorkers on Tuesday are voting on three proposals that could turn out to have long-term impact – and there are some strong opinions on two of them.

The overview: Voters are deciding whether to change the state's redistricting procedures, whether to allow paperless bill distribution in the state legislature, and whether to borrow up to \$2 billion for school technology projects and other capital needs

The dense language of the proposals might be off-putting. Here they are, demystified:

Proposal One:

Redistricting: Ever notice the odd shapes of some of Brooklyn's voting districts? Proposal One would change the way congressional and state legislative district maps are drawn. Under the current law, the legislature is responsible for establishing district lines every ten years. Under the new proposal, a redistricting commission would determine the new district lines, subject to approval by the Governor.

Pros: The non-partisan Citizens Union supports the proposal, saying that while flawed, it will eliminate gerrymandering (drawing the boundaries of districts in a way that gives one party an unfair advantage).

Cons: A number of Brooklyn pols have come out against the proposal, including Councilmember Brad Lander (D-Park Slope-Carroll Gardens). "It sets a dangerous precedent by adding to our state constitution a committee whose rules change based on the party in power," he said. Common Cause has also spoken against the proposal, calling it "open to manipulation."

Proposal Two:

Paperless legislature: In an attempt to cut paper waste and get with the electronic age, this proposal would allow electronic distribution of bills to state legislators before they vote on them, as opposed to the currently-required stacks of paper copies. Bills must still be made available to legislators three days in advance of the vote. Changes would be able to be tracked electronically, and legislators would be able to print the bills out if they wanted.



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Pros: The proposal has received no major opposition. Supporters say the proposal would save about \$53 million annually in paper, waste disposal and other costs.

Cons: Could bills be electronically altered without legislators being aware of the changes? In its opposing arguments section, the New York City 2014 Voter Guide says, the measure “puts the legislative process at risk of delay due to electronic malfunctions or, possibly, hacking.” Another opposing argument: The proposal would hurt upstate New York’s paper business.

Proposal Three:

Smart Schools Bond Act: This act would allow the state to borrow (from bond investors) up to \$2 billion for school capital projects in three categories: beefed up technology (computers and high-tech security systems), new pre-K classrooms and the replacement of classroom trailers.

Of this amount, NYC would receive roughly \$783 million. According to Gotham Gazette, Mayor de Blasio plans to allocate roughly \$310 million of this to create additional seats in existing buildings for his pre-K initiative.

This proposal has raised many issues among educational advocates, both pro and con.

Pros: Gov. Cuomo supports Proposal Three as a way to invest in school technology. Leonie Haimson, CEO of Class Size Matters, is also in favor of it, saying the money would help alleviate overcrowding and create smaller classes.

Constance Evelyn, who serves on the Smart Schools Commission, supports the proposal, saying, “There is a stark difference between a classroom outfitted with up-to-date, advanced technology, and one without.”

Cons: Educational policy analyst Diane Ravitch believes the money “will end up paying for iPads, tablets, and other technology that will be obsolete long before the bonds are paid off.”

The New York City 2014 Voter Guide states in its opposing arguments section: “The state has too much debt already; this \$2 billion bond sale would cause the state to go even deeper into debt.” Also, “If the state is going to issue new bonds, it should be to repair or replace aging infrastructure, including roads, bridges, protection of our drinking water, and/or sewer upgrades.”

The nonpartisan Citizens Budget Commission also opposes the proposal, saying: “New York State is approaching its statutory debt cap,” and “Successful technology programs require significant investment in implementation and the integration of technology in pedagogical practice, not merely the purchase of new hardware like laptops and iPads.” (cbcny.org)

This money would be distributed to non-public schools as well as public, which rings warning bells with some educators.



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The full text of these proposals can be found

at <http://www.elections.ny.gov/ProposedConsAmendments2.html>