

Bernie Sanders: Pass the billionaire tax



Sen. Bernie Sanders speaks at a rally supporting California's billionaire tax on Feb. 18 in Los Angeles. Sanders says Prop 40 is the most important ballot initiative in the country.

BY BERNIE SANDERS
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Proposition 40, the California Billionaire Tax Act, is the most important ballot initiative in the country because it deals

with the most important question facing our country: Can the American people sustain democracy and take on the billionaire class — their power, their greed and their unlimited amounts of money — or are we destined to live in an oligarchic society?

At a time of unprecedented income and wealth inequality, the people of California will decide on the Nov. 3 ballot whether to pass a one-time 5% tax on the wealth of billionaires.

This initiative would raise \$100 billion, enough revenue to prevent some 3 million low-income and working-class Californians from losing healthcare coverage as a result of President Donald Trump's "big beautiful bill," House Resolution 1, as the legislation is also known, which made the largest cut to Medicaid in American history to pay for a \$1 trillion tax break to the top 1%.

Let's be clear. No one with a net worth of less than a billion dollars would pay a penny more in taxes under Prop 40.

This tax would apply only to approximately 260 billionaires in California who are now collectively worth over \$2.4 trillion.

As a result of a rigged tax code, six Nobel Prize-winning economists who support this ballot initiative recently pointed out that while these billionaires more than tripled their wealth over the past decade, they paid a lower effective tax rate than plumbers or nurses.

Incredibly, billionaires in California became \$500 billion richer last year, five times as much as the California wealth tax would raise.

In other words, if Prop 40 passes, billionaires in California would still be \$400 billion richer than they were last year and healthcare would be saved for millions of people in California.

Instead of supporting this initiative and paying their fair share of taxes so that children and working-class people in California can get the healthcare they desperately need, the billionaires are now spending over \$225 million to oppose it.

This effort against Prop 40 is being led by Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google, who is spending over \$100 million to defeat it.

Brin is the fourth wealthiest man in the world with a net worth of \$274 billion. He has become \$127 billion richer just since Trump was elected. If Prop 40 is

passed, Brin would owe \$13.5 billion more in taxes. But don't feel too sorry for him. He would still have \$257 billion left over to feed his family.

And Brin is not alone.

Larry Page, Google's other co-founder, who became nearly \$140 billion richer since Trump's election, would owe \$14.6 billion more in taxes if this ballot initiative is passed, leaving him with \$280 billion.

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, would owe \$13 billion more in taxes under Prop 40, leaving him with \$252 billion.

Don't let these billionaires fool you into believing they no longer live in California and will not have to pay this tax.

Brin still owns at least four mansions in California worth some \$103.5 million. Just because Brin bought another mansion a half mile away from California's border does not give him the right to escape this tax, according to many tax lawyers who have studied this issue.

The same can be said for Page, who still owns a \$65 million residential compound in Silicon Valley close to Google's headquarters, and Zuckerberg, who spent more than \$110 million to purchase at least 11 homes near Meta's headquarters in Menlo Park last year.

But what I find outrageous is the degree to which the oligarchs are attempting to extort the people of California. Heads: billionaires win; Tails: working families lose. They are pointing a proverbial gun at people's heads and bogusly saying: If you vote to provide healthcare for low-income kids by raising our taxes, we're going to punish you and leave the state. How pathetic, how immoral.

Dangerously, many oligarchs today believe that they have the divine right to rule and that they are masters of the universe. They live lives completely separate from ordinary people and could not care less about the 60% of Americans who live paycheck to paycheck. And they are obsessed with becoming even richer and more powerful than they already are.

The result: The oligarchs would rather let people in California suffer or die because they can't afford to go to a doctor than pay just a little bit more in taxes on their massive wealth.

Let's be clear: These billionaires have more money than they could spend in over 100 lifetimes. How many mansions do they need? How many yachts do they need? How many private jets do they need?

Enough is enough!

Instead of spending over \$225 million on TV ads against this wealth tax, I have a better idea for these billionaires: Start paying your fair share of taxes.

In 1933, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said: “We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both.”

What Justice Brandeis said was accurate 93 years ago. It is even more accurate today.

On Nov. 3, I hope very much that the people of California will lead the nation in addressing the unprecedented level of income and wealth inequality that we are experiencing and demand that billionaires pay a 5% tax on their obscene wealth.

For the sake of our entire country, this is a struggle that must be won.

Bernie Sanders is the senior United States senator from Vermont.