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Initiatives attracting big money

Out-of-state donations at issue

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The Arizona Republic
Jul. 10, 2006 12:00 AM

Democracy isn't cheap in Arizona this year. And so far, the statewide initiative campaigns have proven that.

It's only July, and the campaigns already have raised from \$200,000 to more than \$2.2 million in their push to get winning proposals on the November ballot.

The stakes only increased after Thursday's deadline to file petitions. Now, the 10 campaigns must sell their reforms to voters. That takes even more money.

Nearly all the campaigns have some funding from donors outside the state, such as the East Coast-based Farm Sanctuary and Humane Society of the United States, which have given at least \$325,000 to an initiative to make the life of veal calves and pregnant pigs more humane.

Some campaigns have been almost entirely funded by outside sources. A limited-government organization from Illinois has bankrolled an initiative to strengthen private-property rights, giving \$650,000 since June.

RJ Reynolds Tobacco Co. has been the big spender on a proposed smoking ban that will compete with a rival measure backed by health organizations. It has piped at least \$193,000 into Arizona.

Some decry the money flowing into the state from outside sources, interlopers who critics say are attempting to sway state elections.

But experts say voters won't typically reject measures based on funding alone.

"If it's a message that resonates, you can make it work," said Ed Bender, executive director of the nonpartisan Institute on Money and State Politics in Montana, which monitors how spending affects state elections around the country.

But voters are paying attention to the money trail, said Earl de Berge, a Phoenix-based pollster with the Behavior Research Center.

"The more and more it becomes discussed, the more important it will become, particularly for issues that don't have grass roots in Arizona," de Berge said.

Arizonans have been known to have a stubborn streak when outsiders blatantly try to influence elections. In 1990, voters rejected a ballot measure to make Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a paid holiday, after the NFL threatened to relocate the Super Bowl unless the measure passed.

In their own time, two years later, voters approved the holiday.

This campaign season, a group of Arizona ranchers and farmers is trying to make a case against "outsiders" as it rallies against Arizona Humane Farms. The initiative would require large enough enclosures for pregnant pigs and veal calves to extend their limbs, turn around and lie down.

"These are national animal rights groups that brought this to Arizona. They're framing the debate," said Jim Klinker, chairman of the opposition group.

Volunteers with the initiative point to the ranchers' own collection box, which has funding from farm organizations beyond the Grand Canyon State.

The animal-friendly campaigners say many of their volunteers are members of national groups such as humane societies and that the initiative has plenty of support. They submitted 218,273 signatures to get on the ballot and say that volunteers, rather than paid signature collectors, gathered all but 41,000.

"All you need to hear is how many Arizonans went out into the heat to get signatures," said campaign chairman Stephanie Nichols-Young of Phoenix.

The most money has been raised by First Things First for Arizona's Children, which has gathered \$2.2 million, mostly from local sources. The measure would add a tobacco tax to raise money for early childhood education.

The Arizona Home Owners Protection Effort, which hopes to narrow government use of eminent domain, has nearly every drop of its funding from Illinois-based group Americans for Limited Government. The organization has spent big money to get initiatives on the ballot in at least seven states, including Arizona.

Lori Klein, spokeswoman with the Arizona campaign, doesn't apologize for donors outside the state. She claims the Illinois organization doesn't represent corporate self-interest but instead represents concerned citizens around the country.

David Berman, a senior research fellow with the Morrison Institute at Arizona State University, tends to agree that special-interest groups such as RJ Reynolds Tobacco Co. are more of a red light to voters. "They can argue that this is special interest trying to buy the campaign."

The smoking ban backed by health organizations, Smoke-Free Arizona, proposes to ban smoking in most enclosed public places.

Meanwhile, the Arizona Non-Smokers Protection Effort, a rival campaign backed by RJ Reynolds, would exempt bars, tobacco shops and other locations in specific instances.

Local bar owners working with the Non-Smokers Protection campaign say voters will be persuaded by its common sense approach to reform.

Bill Pfeiffer, chairman for the Smoke-Free Arizona campaign, thinks otherwise.

Pfeiffer said voters might not care if money rolls in from out of state, but they do care that it came via Winston-Salem, N.C. "This is an industry where the product, used as designed, causes death and disease," Pfeiffer said.

But Bender, with the Montana non-profit group, has watched RJ Reynolds back similar campaigns in numerous states for more than a decade. They've been effective, he said.

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