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Props 200, 205: different paths to more voting

By Howard Fischer

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Arizonans will get two chances Election Day to make changes to state law that could result in more people voting.

One measure, Proposition 200, uses a carrot approach, holding out the possibility that doing one's civic duty could win you a \$1 million prize.

Proposition 205 offers no prizes, but by sending every registered voter a mail ballot, no one even has to leave home to make their vote count.

The proposals are getting organized opposition from the state's largest business group, however.

Farrell Quinlan, lobbyist for the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said his group thinks both are bad ideas.

Quinlan denied the opposition has anything to do with concerns that the type of voters attracted by the measures might not support candidates favorable to business.

But that clearly is the goal of the organizers of one of the measures — and a possible side effect of the other.

"All we want to do is have everybody vote," said Tucson physician Mark Osterloh, the creator and sole financial backer of the voter lottery, which Quinlan acknowledged would probably bring more people to the polls.

But that, he said, doesn't necessarily make it a good thing. Those new voters, Quinlan said, won't necessarily make informed decisions.

Osterloh said that's not true.

"Once people decide to vote, they're going to vote for who's going to take care of their issues," he said. And they will inform themselves of the candidates' stances to learn who will do that.

Quinlan says Osterloh is making assumptions.

"He makes this case that just because people are going to show up and vote that people are going to become active participants in our civic life and learn about the issues," he said.

Quinlan noted that it doesn't take informed voting to have a chance at that million-dollar prize. In fact, it doesn't require marking the ballot at all.

Background on the propositions

- The measure: Proposition 200 — Voter Reward Act: Will enter the name of each person who votes in a statewide primary or general election in a lottery to win a \$1 million.

Core facts: Voter turnout is a always a concern. The payout is \$1 million for each election. The law would be retroactive to this year's elections. The money would come from unclaimed lottery prizes.

For or against: Supporters include Tucson doctor Mark Osterloh, who led he movement to put it on the ballot. Opponents include the Arizona Chamber of Commerce.

Real-world impacts: Two voters will become millionaires each election year. Supporters believe the incentive will attract more voters to the polls. Critics believe voters who are voting only to win the prize will be less informed.

The measure: Proposition 205 — Your Right to Vote: Would convert Arizona elections to mostly voting by mail.

Core facts: Every registered voter would be sent a mail ballot with stamped return envelope before each election. An absolute minimum number of typical polling places would be open in each

"All you have to do is show up, sign in that you are voting and get your entry for the lottery," he said. "And if that's the only reason why you're showing up ... that doesn't mean you're going to take the hours or read a newspaper to learn about these issues."

Osterloh said that represents an elitist attitude.

"The biggest impact will be in primaries," Osterloh said, "where so few people vote that we tend to have extreme right-wing and left-wing candidates" who win with low turnouts. He said the new voters will be "more in the rational middle."

Rick Murphy, sponsor of the all-mail election proposition, said he has no proof more voters automatically means the election of more moderate candidates. But Murphy does believe it could change the outcome of elections.

While Osterloh wants to provide a carrot to would-be voters, Murphy simply wants to make the process easier.

His plan, Proposition 205, would require election officials to mail a ballot to every registered voter, complete with a stamped return envelope.

Murphy said a similar plan enacted in Oregon increased voter turnout among some groups that had not bothered to show up at the polls, like homemakers and youths.

Quinlan said his fear is not of more voters. But he said the measure is unnecessary as Arizonans already can vote early by mail. In fact, up to half of all ballots now are done by mail.

He fears that more ballots in the mail would lead to more fraud.

Maricopa County Elections Director Karen Osborne doesn't think so. She noted that votes cast by mail must include the signature of the voter and that each signature is checked against those already on file.

In Pima County, however, the need to verify large number of signatures, and changes in people's signatures over time, has slowed vote counting and caused valid ballots to be challenged.

The initiative requires local governments to have some traditional polling places open on Election Day, but doesn't specify how many or how far apart they can be. The proposition says only that the number should be minimal.

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