

Published: 10.19.2008

Study carefully before voting

Our view: Titles may belie initiatives' intent

The propositions are a result of Arizona's populist Constitution, which includes the right to amend it through initiative and referendum.

Arizona citizens have the right to propose and approve constitutional changes through the initiative process: Suggest a law and gather signatures to get it on the ballot for voters to consider. Six of the eight statewide propositions are initiatives.

Likewise, the Legislature can refer measures to the voters for a decision through the referendum process. In this election Proposition 102, which defines marriage, was referred to the voters by the Legislature.

Arizona's populist, participatory spirit does not always evolve into solid public policy. It is subject to abuses.

- The initiative process, especially gathering signatures, is costly.

The Constitution's populist framers probably envisioned a passionate grass-roots army of volunteers marching door to door collecting signatures. The founders also saw the initiative as a way to reduce the impact of special interests. However, exactly the opposite often happens.

For an initiative to be on the Arizona ballot, more than 153,000 valid signatures are required. That army of volunteers working nights and weekends is unlikely to gather the necessary votes.

Thus, an initiative organizer gathers money and hires a company that solicits the names and signatures of registered voters for a price. You've probably been approached by them on some streets and at events. Signature-gathering companies pay contractors about \$1 to \$2 per signature.

Constitutional abuse

We also believe the process to amend the Constitution is overused.

The Constitution's 28,000 or so words define the framework for the government's operation and also outline individual rights.

As we said in 2006, the Constitution, as with most state constitutions, is more detailed than our nation's, and changes are inevitable.

However our Constitution is becoming a bulletin board because of efforts to tack on issues du jour without looking at the long-term effects or attempting to resolve problems that are non-existent. If an issue is real, it can often be resolved better by statute.

We believe that amendments at the state level must address long-term issues, must stand the test and scrutiny of time, and must not be redundant to state statute or breach the integrity of our Constitution.

We believe that amending the Constitution should be done prudently with the highest respect for our laws, people and future. The everyday details should be dealt with through statutes passed by the Legislature.