



Ballot Initiative STRATEGY CENTER

Ballot Bulletin

May 2009

People deserve a citizen initiative process that serves them. Unfortunately, the 24 states that provide citizens with the opportunity for direct democracy are letting special interests and ideologues highjack and take advantage of a broken system badly in need of fundamental reform.

Beginning in 2004, BISC began to receive complaints from various states concerning abuses in the signature gathering efforts of some ballot initiative campaigns. Over the past four years, we have seen a dramatic increase in use of signature gathering fraud and deception by initiative campaign committee's and the vendors they hire to qualify initiatives for the ballot. BISC has [taken these vendors to task](#) for their deceitful practices, and will continue to monitor their deceptive activity to [stop ballot fraud](#).

In fact, at every step of the way throughout the ballot initiative process, citizens are being subjected to [abuse, fraud, and deception](#). Misleading and deceptive ballot language is often submitted, there are widespread cases of people being lied to during the signature gathering phase, and at the end of the day voters are being asked to make a decision about amending their state constitution when the path to the ballot lacks the integrity citizens deserve.

BISC has [been committed](#) to shining a spotlight on the problems that exist and has worked with states to take action and implement [common sense reforms](#) that will restore integrity to an important process that helps create the foundation of our democracy.

Last week, our hard work paid off when Colorado's Governor Bill Ritter signed a [bipartisan reform measure](#) that will prevent fraud in Colorado's initiative petition process. Colorado's reform measure could be a model for other states looking to advance ballot integrity and interest is growing in other states to clean up the process. This month BISC attended the 2009 Democratic Association of Secretary of State's Spring Policy Conference and we look forward to building the coalitions necessary to provide voters with a citizen initiative process and system that works for them instead of against them.

CA Voters Approve \$21B Budget Gap

In California, six budget related ballot initiatives were put to voters on Tuesday. The measures sought to address a \$42 billion projected deficit by making deep spending cuts, raising revenue, and increasing borrowing in order to close the budget gap. Anti-tax advocates are spinning Prop. 1A's defeat as a victory, yet it's important to note that 1A not only asked for revenue increases, it also asked voters to approve a spending cap. Did voters reject tax increases or a spending cap? They rejected both.

Big Shift on Marriage Equality

Last Sunday marked the [five year anniversary](#) of the first gay marriage license issued in Massachusetts, the first state in the nation to allow same sex marriage. Recent Lake Research Partners polling asked MA residents their thoughts on a state constitutional amendment gay marriage ban. Polling found many residents supporting marriage equality because it promoted traditional values like commitment and responsibility. Fully 62% of respondents said they would oppose banning same sex marriage, up from 52% in a similar 2005 survey.

SOS Ballot Stalls

The [SOS Ballot initiative](#) seeks to prevent workers from having the freedom to choose a secret ballot or majority sign up without [corporate intimidation](#). After working to advance initiatives and legislative referendums to the 2010 ballot, SOS has either stalled or failed in a number of states, including Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, and Washington.