



DEBRA BOWEN

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99 Years of California Initiatives, One Day Left to Qualify for June 8 Ballot

SACRAMENTO – On the eve of the deadline to qualify initiatives for the June 8, 2010, Statewide Primary Election, Secretary of State Debra Bowen today rounded up some highlights of the 99 years of the initiative process.

“For nearly a century, the state’s ‘direct democracy’ option has provided Californians with the power to place a measure on a statewide ballot,” said Secretary Bowen, the state’s chief elections officer. “The initiative process has been used to take some of the most pressing issues of the day – from prohibition to taxes to campaign finance reform – directly to the voting public.”

On October 10, 1911, California voters amended the state constitution to establish the initiative process, becoming the tenth state to do so. The initiative process allows any citizen to go straight to the voters to create or change laws, or amend the state’s constitution. A statewide initiative requires a simple majority of the public’s vote to be enacted. Each initiative may address only one subject.

Highlights of California Initiative Trivia and Trends

- California voters approved the initiative process by a margin of three to one (168,744 to 52,093) in 1911. In the same statewide election, the referendum and recall processes were also amended into the state constitution, and women were granted the right to vote in California.
- Since 1911, more than 1,600 initiatives have been circulated in California; 338 initiatives have qualified for a statewide ballot.
- Over the last 99 years, 33 percent of all statewide initiatives that qualified for the ballot were approved by voters.
- Of the 112 initiatives approved by voters since 1911, 46 have been constitutional amendments or constitutional amendment/statutory changes. (While constitutional amendments require a two-thirds vote of both houses in the state Legislature, constitutional-amendment initiatives can pass by a simple majority of votes cast in a statewide election.)
- The most initiatives ever on a single statewide ballot? Seventeen in the 1914 General Election. There were 48 total ballot propositions that year, including legislative measures and referenda.

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Qualifying an Initiative for the Statewide Ballot

- A proponent drafts a proposed statutory or constitutional amendment and submits it to the Attorney General, along with a fee of \$200.
- The Attorney General prepares the legal title and summary that is required to appear on all initiative petitions. If the measure requires a fiscal analysis, the Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst's Office will prepare an analysis. The Attorney General then forwards the title and summary to the proponent and to the Secretary of State.
- The Secretary of State then provides calendar deadlines to the proponent and to county elections officials, and the initiative may be circulated for signatures of registered voters.
- The initiative proponent has 150 days to circulate petitions for the measure and collect the requisite number of registered voter's signatures to qualify the initiative for the ballot. Currently, 694,354 valid signatures are required to qualify a constitutional amendment initiative – eight percent of the total votes cast for governor in the 2006 gubernatorial election – and 433,971 valid signatures are required to qualify a statutory initiative – five percent of the total votes cast for governor in the 2006 gubernatorial election.
- Initiative petition signatures are submitted to county elections officials who then count and verify the signatures against voter records. If there are sufficient valid signatures, the measure is placed on the ballot for the next statewide election to be held no less than 131 days after the initiative qualifies.

Currently, five ballot measures in total have qualified for the June 8 Statewide Primary Election – two initiatives and three legislative measures.

For more about initiatives past and present, go to www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_j.htm.

To sign up for regular ballot measure updates via email, RSS feed or Twitter, go to www.sos.ca.gov/multimedia.

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