

OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

SOUND OFF
Should profits made from the Promise Keepers' rental of Autzen Stadium go toward anti-discrimination programming at the University? Let us know.

EDITORIAL

Paid signature-gathering erodes initiative process

OUR OPINION:
Paying people to expand petition lists does not foster democracy

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What do you think? Write us a letter expressing your opinion or E-mail us at ode@oregon.uoregon.edu. Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted. The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.

"Are you a registered voter in the State of Oregon?" Just think if you had a dollar for every time you heard that.

Now just think that some petitioners receive as much as \$3 each time you sign.

This kind of payment for signature-gathering hurts the initiative process in a number of ways.

First, the process is opened up to fraud. The state attorney general's office has already subpoenaed as many as 20 people to appear before the grand jury regarding potential fraud, according to last Thursday's *Oregonian*.

Fifty-eight people tried to register to vote. Members of the group were living in a hotel and listed their mailing address as Affinity Communications, a Salem petition circulator. False swearing of residency is a felony. Secretary of State Phil Keisling said he feels that fraud of this kind is widespread. However, he stated that all valid signatures will count, even if they were obtained fraudulently.

Secondly, the cost of getting an initiative on the ballot will continue to rise as demands increase for higher payment in return for signatures. What was once a truly grassroots endeavor has fallen to those with enough cash to get something on the ballot.

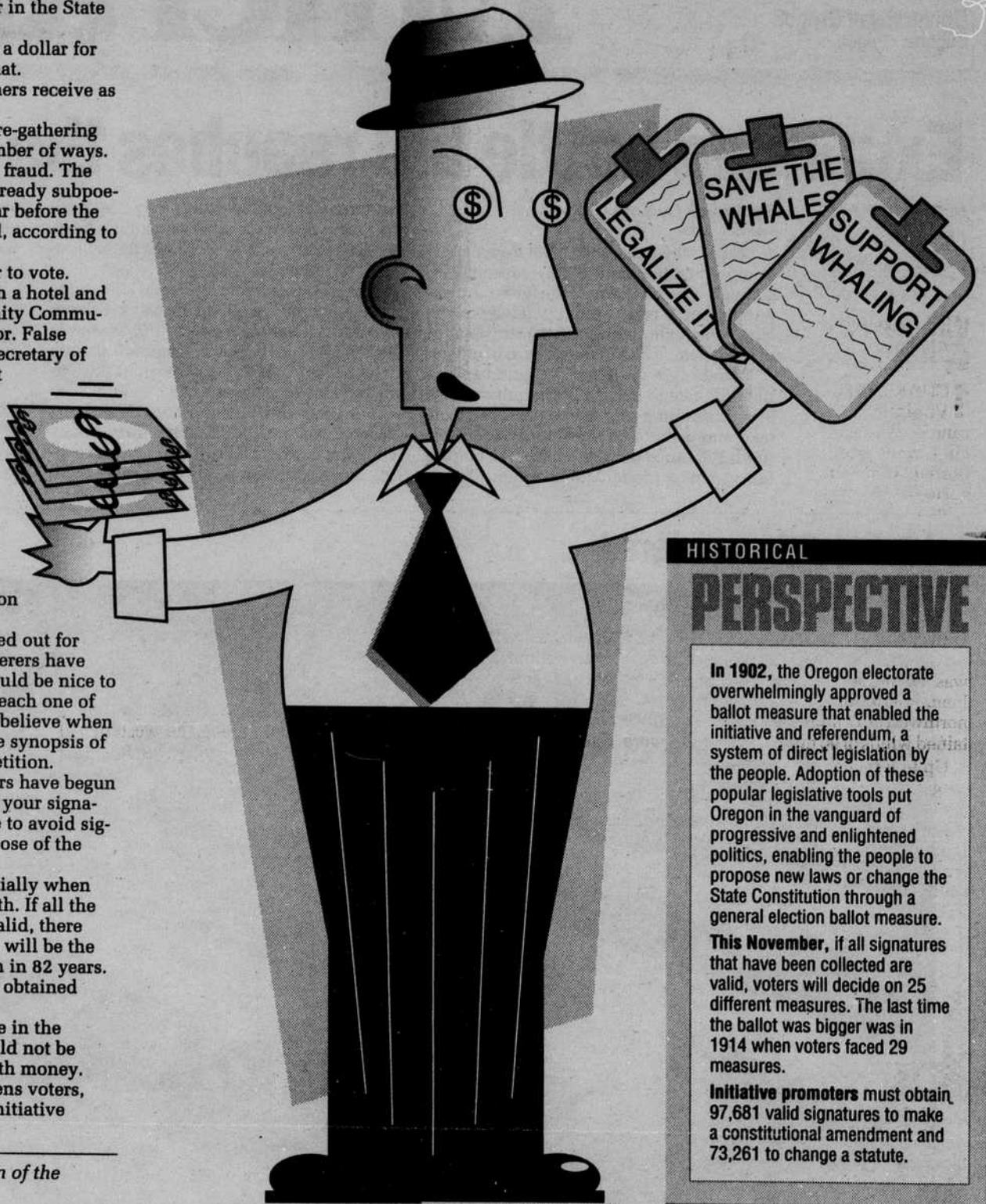
With so much money being handed out for each signature, some signature-gatherers have begun to load up on petitions. It would be nice to think these people truly care about each one of the issues. However, that is hard to believe when some are unable to expand upon the synopsis of the issue written at the top of the petition.

Not only that, but many petitioners have begun to use more aggressive tactics to get your signature. These tactics may force people to avoid signature-gatherers, defeating the purpose of the initiative process altogether.

All of this is disheartening. Especially when the ballot continues to grow in length. If all the gathered signatures turn out to be valid, there will be 25 statewide measures. This will be the longest ballot this state has voted on in 82 years. How many of those signatures were obtained fraudulently?

Citizens have a right to participate in the democratic process. That right should not be manipulated or swayed by those with money. Paying signature-gatherers disheartens voters, ultimately forcing them out of the initiative process.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1902, the Oregon electorate overwhelmingly approved a ballot measure that enabled the initiative and referendum, a system of direct legislation by the people. Adoption of these popular legislative tools put Oregon in the vanguard of progressive and enlightened politics, enabling the people to propose new laws or change the State Constitution through a general election ballot measure.

This November, if all signatures that have been collected are valid, voters will decide on 25 different measures. The last time the ballot was bigger was in 1914 when voters faced 29 measures.

Initiative promoters must obtain 97,681 valid signatures to make a constitutional amendment and 73,261 to change a statute.

Source: 1995-96 Oregon Blue Book

READER VOICES

How do you feel about petitioners being paid for signature-gathering?



"It wouldn't influence me personally, but I could see how some people would be concerned."

Edén Epstein
Post-bacc. studies



"The signature is in favor of an issue that is for the good of the community. They [petitioners] are working and should be paid. They should earn some money if they are doing a job."

Gustavo Fonseca
Graduate student



"I don't believe they should be paid. It seems that they aren't really interested in what the petition is about. It's not because they care about the issue, it's because they are getting paid."

Deanne Ogawa
Junior



"There should be some sort of limit set to how much a petitioner can be paid. Keep it at a grassroots level so the amount of money the petitioner is getting doesn't overshadow the issue."

Jake Weber
Junior



"That really bugs me because they [petitioners] will give you one thing to sign then underneath they have 10 other things to sign. Some people are doing it for the cause but most of the people who ask me to sign are doing it for the money."

Tony Hall
Sophomore



"I don't necessarily think they should be paid. If they really care about the cause, they should do it on their own."

Wendee Sakumoto
Freshman

Oregon Daily Emerald

P. O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. A member of the Associated Press, the Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union.

Unsigned editorials represent the opinion of the Emerald editorial board; signed columns represent the opinion of the columnist. The Emerald is private property. The unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

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