

# Measure 26 may help eliminate forgery

If passed, this measure would stop per-signature payment of petition circulators

## Oregon votes 2002

**Ken Paulman**  
Freelance Reporter

A measure to stop the payment of petition circulators on a per-signature basis will be on the ballot Tuesday.

Sponsors of Measure 26 believe that eliminating the practice will help reduce forgery, fraud and misrepresentation. If passed, the measure will still allow signature gatherers to be paid on salary or by the hour.

"The process is dominated by special interests who throw money on the streets to buy signatures from persons whose only motivation is making a quick buck," initiative sponsor Bob Davis said in a

prepared statement.

According to the National Council of State Legislators, costs for qualifying ballot measures in Oregon in 2000 ranged from \$65,000 to \$400,000.

But not everyone thinks Measure 26 is such a good idea.

Dane Waters, president of the Initiative and Referendum Institute in Washington, D.C., said laws like Measure 26 are not necessary, are not good public policy and, above all, are unconstitutional.

"There is no proof of rampant fraud," he said. "We don't believe there's a necessity (for the measure)."

Oregon prohibited all paid signature gathering in 1935, but that changed when a 1988 Supreme Court decision invalidated a similar ban in Colorado.

It is illegal in Oregon to pay someone to sign or refrain from signing any petition, which means that petition circulators cannot offer money or anything of value to

citizens to get them to sign their petitions. But there is currently no regulation barring initiative sponsors from paying "bounties" to petition circulators, which the NCSL says runs as high as \$1 to \$3 per signature.

Recently, petition circulators James Gurga and Paul Frankel pled guilty to fraud in a signature gathering scam in Portland. According to the union-sponsored Voter Education Project, which filed the complaint, Frankel and Gurga lured people with a fake petition that promised lower gas prices. Voters were then asked to sign several pages underneath to "validate" their signatures.

As voters signed the other pages, they were unknowingly putting their signatures on a wide range of other statewide ballot initiatives.

Oregonians for Initiative Integrity spokeswoman Patty Wentz said the majority of signatures are gathered by petitioners who get copies

of initiatives, canvass independently, and then sell the signatures back to the campaign.

Wentz said the fact that Gurga and Frankel were paid on a per-signature basis encouraged them to mislead voters.

"The more they are paid, the more incentive they have to break election law," she said.

Waters said misrepresentation and forgery are just as likely to occur among people who are zealous advocates of a particular initiative, and banning payment per signature will not necessarily prevent the initiative process from being abused.

"We support anything to do away with fraud," he said. "But we oppose any initiative that inhibits the use of the initiative process."

The Institute does not engage in political campaigns against ballot measures, Waters said, but does take legal action against laws be-


lieved to be unconstitutional.

According to the NCSL, Maine, Mississippi, North Dakota, Washington and Wyoming have passed similar legislation, but all except North Dakota's and Wyoming's laws have been struck down by the courts. A federal judge upheld North Dakota's law on the basis that paying per signature does encourage fraud. In other states, however, the courts concluded that there was not enough evidence of widespread fraud to justify the restrictions.

Waters said that it is ultimately up to the voters to make sure they know what they're signing.

"It's not the government's responsibility to protect the people from themselves," he said. "It's the responsibility of an individual to read the petition before they sign it."

Ken Paulman is a freelance writer for the Emerald.



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# Measures raise tax debate about health care, labeling

Measures 23 and 27 ask if voters want universal health care and if GE food should be labeled.

Jody Burruss

## Oregon votes 2002

Environment/Science/Technology Reporter

Money is the underlying controversy associated with Measures 23 and 27, which ask Oregonians to voice their opinions about health care and food labeling by voting in the Nov. 5 general election.

Measure 23 asks Oregonians if they want universal health care for all residents. Measure 27 asks voters to decide if genetically engineered foods sold in or from Oregon need to be labeled.

If Measure 27 passes, all GE foods — defined as foods containing more than one-tenth of one percent of GE material by weight — would need a label, prepared by the Oregon Department of Agriculture, on the outside of its packaging.

Robert Buchanan, former director for the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Economic Development, wrote in the official 2002 general election voters' pamphlet that the DOA estimates Measure 27 will add \$118 million to general fund expenses. And this burden, he said, will be left on the shoulders of the taxpayers.

Proponents of this measure say Oregonians have a right to know what is in the food they eat. Taylor Stevenson, a member of the Yes on 27 Committee, said the United States is losing money because labels are not already being used.

"It's ridiculous that America doesn't have these labels because the rest of the world is ahead of us in the international market," she said. "We're losing money every year because we don't have a standard for labeling."

Charles Margulis, GE campaign manager for Greenpeace, said in the voters' pamphlet that labels are already required in more than 25 countries, and he added that no price increases have resulted because of it.

Opponents of the measure say

labels would be misleading and confusing and some add that there is no need for people to know whether their food has been genetically altered.

**"It's ridiculous that America doesn't have these labels because the rest of the world is ahead of us in the international market."**

**Taylor Stevenson**  
Member of the Yes on 27 Committee


Bill Perry, director of government relations for the Oregon Restaurant Association, said the association is opposed to the measure because it will discourage the growth of Oregon businesses.

"Any products shipped out of this state will have a disadvantage in the marketplace," he said.

If passed, Measure 23 would create health care finance plans for Turn to **Measures**, page 6

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