

BALLOT: Getting an initiative on the ballot requires a 16-step process

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can add just their name, signature and address to a list of names if overseen by a registered circulator, or can fill out a longer form that requires more information if a circulator is not present.

Who can sponsor a petition?

Anyone can be one of the (up to three) chief sponsors of a petition for an initiative or referendum, including legislators themselves. The two referendums currently gathering signatures both list as chief sponsors at least one legislator who voted against the law they are now trying to get voters to veto.

What is the process for getting an initiative on the ballot?

Getting an initiative on the ballot requires a 16-step process, starting with submission of a form detailing the chief sponsors and proposed language of the initiative. After receiving approval and signature sheets from the state, chief sponsors must get 1,000 sponsor signatures verified by the state before the attorney general crafts the "ballot title" — a 15-word caption, 25-word statement in favor, 25-word statement against and 125-word neutral description of the law's effect.

There are opportunities for opponents and sponsors to challenge the fairness of the ballot title wording all the way up to the Oregon Supreme Court. After the language is approved, sponsors must get approval of petition sheets using that language before getting approved to begin circulating the petition. Once signatures are turned into the Secretary of State's office, the measure is approved to appear on the ballot during the next general election if enough of the signatures are determined to be valid.

The process for getting a referendum on the ballot is shorter, skipping the 1,000 sponsor signatures and placing the ballot title process after signatures are already being collected. This is because signatures for the referendum of a new law must be turned in and validated within 90 days of the legislature adjourning.

What safeguards are in place to make sure the process is valid?

An initiative or referendum's chief sponsors are required to submit campaign finance records and their payroll for those who are collecting signatures. Signatures must only be collected on special sheets with wording and layout approved by the Secretary of State's office. Circulators must be registered with the state after receiving training, and must sign an affidavit that they personally witnessed each signature on their sheets take place. It is against the law for circulators to make false statements, add false signatures to the petition or offer money or anything of value in exchange for signatures. Once signatures are submitted to the state, they are checked against the signature on the person's voter registration card.

What changes does Richardson want to make to the initiative process?

When the official ballot title language is released, opponents of an initiative can challenge it in court. Because sponsors of initiatives are not allowed to begin circulating a petition until that language is official, a drawn-out court process can leave them little time to gather signatures once the ballot title is approved. Secretary of State Dennis Richardson wants to allow sponsors to begin collecting signatures before the ballot title is approved, similar to the referendum process. That would take away opponents' power to use a challenge to that language as a delay tactic, but also risks causing citizens to sign a petition based on language that is later ruled misleading or biased.

Why is there talk of a special election in January?

Oregon law states that if a referendum collects enough valid signatures it will appear on the general election ballot in November of the next year. During the 2017 legislative session, however, Democrats passed a bill creating a different set of rules just for referendums seeking to repeal part or all of a \$550 million package of new taxes designed to fund Medicaid during the 2017-2019 biennium. In order to move the vote up to January, the special rules include giving the state permission to mail out ballots before voter's pamphlets, shortening public comment periods and having a special committee made up of two Democrats and one Republican draft the ballot title instead of the Attorney General.

Republicans argue that the special election, passed without a single vote from their party, is an attempt to undermine the referendum process in order to help a bill favored by Democrats, while Democrats argue that the timeline is necessary to give the state time to re-work the Oregon Health Authority's budget if voters nix the tax. The state held a special referendum election in 2010 on Measure 66 and Measure 67, which challenged a \$750 million tax hike, for similar reasons.

The legislature also voted to change the timeline for any referendum on the \$5.3 billion transportation package up to the May primaries instead of waiting until November, but so far no one has filed paperwork to challenge that piece of legislation. Sponsors of Referendum 301 against the health care tax, led by Rep. Julie Parrish, are gathering signatures now.

How does Oregon compare to other states?

According to Ballotpedia, the "encyclopedia of American politics," only 26 states give their citizens the power to put legislation on the ballot, and only 15 of those allow for referendums, statutory initiatives and constitutional initiatives like Oregon. Ballotpedia states that Oregon holds the record for most statewide initiatives and referendums passed, at 384 as of 2014, and that Oregon holds the record for the most initiatives on the ballot in a single year, with voters making decisions on 27 different measures in 1912. One of those measures gave Oregon women the right to vote.

ZENGER: Students have access to cameras and CCTVs

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cityscape. She knew the exact number of steps and stairs in various PSU buildings from front door to classroom.

She learned to navigate through the school's underground tunnel system.

After graduation, Zenger taught for 10 years at the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind. In the three years Zenger has worked at the IMESD, Superintendent Mark Mulvihill has become a fan.

"When we hired her, we were really excited to have such a highly qualified person who can relate to kids in such a unique way," Mulvihill said. "She is a huge gift to the ESD."

Zenger's arsenal includes everything from white canes to the latest in technology.

"The goal is to make them as independent as possible," Zenger said.

On a recent day, she worked with Ellen Paulsen, a freshman at Pendleton High School. The teenager has uveitis, an inflammation of the middle layer of the eye, and experiences disconcerting fluctuations in vision.

The two met up by the front office after Paulsen retrieved a white cane from her locker. They headed to the school's front walk where the teenager practiced sweeping with the cane to detect objects and drop-offs. They walked side by side, Jude guiding Zenger and Paulsen practicing with her cane, knowing the exercise could help her in the future.

"Potentially, I could go blind," Paulsen said.

Paulsen said this matter-of-factly, as if she was talking about a minor inconvenience. Zenger smiled.

"The kids who do the best — they have confidence and an attitude of 'It's just not going to stop me,'" she said.

As the teen approaches a flight of steps, Zenger asked, "Do you remember how to do stairs?"

"Yes," Paulsen said, with a smile. "I got this."

She dangled the cane out front, letting the tip hit each step as she climbed.

The cane is one of the most low-tech tools in Paulsen's arsenal of resources. Under Zenger's tutelage, she is mastering hardware and software designed for people who are visually impaired. Tools include closed-captioned television, magnifiers, cameras and a myriad programs to scan text and read aloud, enlarge type and change mouse, background and type



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sharon Zenger, right, demonstrates one particular method of holding a white cane while walking upstairs to freshman Ellen Paulsen on Friday at Pendleton High School.

on computer screens to eye-friendly colors and contrasts. There's Braille, of course, but now there is something called "refreshable Braille," a device that converts text to Braille characters using round-tipped pins that can be raised or lowered into various letter combinations. Zenger also has a library of traditional paper Braille books in her office: "Charlotte's Web," "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," "Little House on the Prairie" and dozens of others.

Students can use cameras and CCTVs to magnify a dissecting tray or a white board across the room. A multitude of applications designed for iPads and smartphones round out an ever-increasing list of options that didn't exist when Zenger was a girl preparing for blindness.

Paulsen rolls a cart from class to class, stocked with camera, computer, CCTV, iPad and textbooks.

As the teenager goes to her next class, Zenger and Jude head for the parking lot.

The two are a team. They rarely stray from one another. Zenger's cell phone message says, "You've reached Sharon and Jude."

In the parking lot, Tod waits for Sharon in a silver 2015 GMC Terrain. While he waits, he spends his time sleeping and thinking, running errands or going to the car wash as Sharon meets with students. Back on the road, the retired electrician drives while his daughter makes calls.

"She's mostly on the phone, taking

care of business," Tod said. "This is a rolling work area."

They travel miles and miles together — the odometer reads 90,000 miles — in an easy camaraderie. Except for the fact that she can't drive, there are few reminders that she can't see.

"I forget most of the time," he said.

He remembers the early days. Sharon got diagnosed at age three after her parents noticed she stumbled in dim light and sometimes wouldn't reach for objects. They helped her prepare for worsening vision, but encouraged her to do what she could, even driving. He remembers when she made the decision to turn in her license.

"One day, she came home and handed me her license," he recalled. "I said, 'What's this?' She said, 'I just don't feel comfortable any more.'"

While she doesn't drive, it's obvious Zenger feels comfortable in life. Part of the credit goes to Jude. The dog takes his job as Zenger's eyes seriously. He walks a brisk 3.5 miles-per-hour, she said, a perfect pace, and likes to be on the go, just like her. Occasionally, he disobeys her in order to shield her from dangers such as the oncoming driver who tried to beat her through a crosswalk and misjudged their pace. Jude swung her around and led her back to the curb.

The dog doesn't pay much attention to anyone other than Zenger.

"He knows who he's working for," Zenger said, with a smile, "and that's me."

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