

Special interests hijacking initiatives

As Abraham Lincoln stated during the Gettysburg Address, we must dedicate ourselves to the task "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." I couldn't agree more with those famous words. However, sometimes I think we take the "by the people" component a little too far, distorting it beyond recognition.

Today, ballot initiatives are one of the ways in which everyday citizens can have a say in the lawmaking process. These initiatives are an extremely important part of the democratic process both across the country and in Missouri. But that process can certainly be abused and misused.

In California, for example, direct democracy through ballot initiatives has, in many cases, been hijacked by special interests supporting their own agendas.

Just last year, Amazon launched a massive campaign to put an initiative on the ballot to overturn a state law requiring them to pay sales tax.

Even though Amazon backed off the initiative before it passed, this situation and others like it are more about special interests working on their own behalf and less about giving ordinary citizens a voice. According to the Center for Governmental Studies, special interest groups spent more than \$1.3 billion on proposition battles in California between 2000 and 2006.

Let's not forget the ballot initiative introduced in San Francisco last year to ban circumcision. What was Gov. Jerry Brown's response? To sign a bill that prevents local governments from banning male circumcision. Is that really how democracy is supposed to work?

Cases like these demonstrate that some things are best left to elected officials, who have the time, responsibility and resources to research, review, deliberate and weigh the pros and cons of certain issues before making an informed decision. The ballot initiative process circumvents the legislature, bypassing it as a way to make laws. Special interest groups launch heavily slanted campaigns for their initiatives, sometimes using misinformation, to appeal directly to voters' emotions and without the vetting process that legislation requires. Clearly, the results can lead to laws that should never have been passed.

Here in Missouri, we have our fair share of ballot initiatives. One that I'm particularly wary of is the proposal deceptively called the "Payday Loan



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