

Ballot Measures Meet With Limited Success in Face of Large Spending

The high-profile defeat of a carbon tax proposal in Washington state attracted substantial attention in the recent election cycle, but numerous other ballot measures were presented to voters in a dozen states. Based on public data posted by the non-partisan Ballotpedia, it appears that industry prevailed in every case in which it outspent (in cash and in-kind contributions) environmental interests. Even when there was no funded opposition, environmental measures did not consistently win voter approval.

For starters, the Washington proposal to impose a per metric ton fee on large carbon emitters starting in 2020 was defeated by a wide margin, 57 to 43 percent. (Note, percentages and dollar figures are rounded up.) Opponents of the measure spent \$29.9 million dollars, \$13.3 million of which was donated by BP America — considerably more than the \$15.7 million spent by supporters, which included over \$3 million from The Nature Conservancy.

Efforts to rein in oil and gas mining met with limited success. A Florida ban on coastal off-shore drilling passed overwhelmingly (69 to 31 percent), but it had bipartisan support. In fact, no political action committees registered to make donations in support or opposition. In contrast, Colorado voters defeated (55 to 45 percent) a measure that would have prohibited new oil and gas mining projects, including fracking, within 2,500 feet of occupied buildings and certain protected areas, such as parks. Opponents' spending dwarfed that of the proponents' — \$30.2 million to \$1.2 million.

Measures to raise oil and gas taxes also failed. Missourians voted against (46 to 54 percent) a 10 cents per gallon tax increase on motor and alterna-

tive fuels that would have been phased in over four years. Supporters spent \$4.1 million, but no funds were spent in opposition. Similarly, Washington state voters registered their opposition (53 to 46 percent) to a tax on crude oil and other products received through pipelines that would have funded oil spill response work. No committees were established to oppose or support the measure.

Proposed increases in renewable energy portfolio standards fared evenly. A proposal to increase standards 50 percent by 2030 failed in Arizona (69 to 31 percent), but succeeded in Nevada by a comfortable margin (59 to 41 percent). Both measures were supported by Tom Steyer's NextGen Climate Action committee, which spent \$10.3 million in Nevada and \$23.3 million in Arizona. In Nevada, no funds were raised to oppose the measure, whereas,

in Arizona the victorious opponents spent \$30.7 million.

In addition, Nevada voters rejected (67 to 33 percent) a proposed constitutional amendment to

require an open, competitive energy market that would secure the right of consumers to select their energy providers. Opponents spent a whopping \$63.3 million, as compared to the \$21.6 million spent by supporters.

Bond measures received a mixed reception from voters. In California, voters rejected (52 to 48 percent) a \$8.8 billion bond issuance for water infrastructure and other projects. The measure failed even though supporters spent \$4.3 million and no committees were formed in opposition. In contrast, Rhode Island voters authorized a bond issuance for environmental, water infrastructure, and recreation projects (79 to 21 percent), and in Maine approved a \$30 million bond measure for wastewater infrastructure (55 to 45



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percent). In neither case were funds raised in support or opposition.

Natural resources protection measures in Alaska and Montana both failed. An Alaskan proposal to impose new requirements for projects that have the potential to hurt certain fish habitat was easily defeated (38 to 62 percent). Opponents of the measure outspent supporters \$10.6 to \$1.9 million. Similarly, a Montana measure failed (56 to 44 percent) that would have required new hard rock mine permits to contain reclamation plans that avoid the need for perpetual polluted water treatment. Spending by opponents was four times that of opponents — \$5.2 million versus \$1.3 million.

Finally, some less controversial natural resource ballot measures, on which no funds were spent in opposition, garnered support. In Connecticut, voters convincingly endorsed a measure to require public hearings and a two-thirds majority vote for the sale of state-owned properties, such as parks. And, in Georgia, voters okayed a revenue-neutral allocation of 80 percent of the state's tax revenue from sporting goods stores to a trust fund for land preservation. Georgia voters also approved a new method for establishing the value of conserved forestland and for commercial timberland property.

But, all in all, 2018 was not a particularly fruitful election cycle for supporters of environmental ballot measures — particularly when their proposals faced well-funded opposition, but sometimes even with no opposition.

There was no green wave among the states in last fall's elections