

## Measure would curb political influence of employee unions

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SACRAMENTO — California Republican interests have qualified a ballot measure that would severely curb the political influence of public and private employee unions while depriving Democratic political candidates of a major source of campaign cash.

The measure, which bans political contributions through payroll deductions, qualified Tuesday for the November 2012 statewide ballot. With labor's primary funding source under attack, the measure sets up an expensive campaign season ahead for both sides.

Funded in part by wealthy GOP donor and Stanford University physicist Charles Munger Jr. and backed by former Secretary of State George Shultz, the measure bans corporation and union contributions from collecting political funds from employees and union members through payroll deduction.

Opponents say the initiative has no practical impact on corporations because businesses don't often collect political funds from employees. But it would ban labor unions from its common practice of using payroll deductions to collect political funds from members — a move that would hamper Democrat-friendly unions from funneling money to political causes.

Labor leaders are already gearing up for a multi-million dollar battle to prevent what they say is a corporate attempt to limit the free speech of working- and middle-class people. He noted that taxpayers have already bailed out banks and financial institutions under the Troubled Asset Relief Program to deal with the subprime mortgage crisis.

"It's not enough for them to have taken our houses and it's not enough for them to make millions off the TARP funding and federal government support for the banks, now they want even more. They want us to not even have a voice in politics whatsoever," said Art Pulaski, executive secretary-treasurer of the California Labor Federation, an umbrella organization that represents more than 2 million union members.

The Stop Special Interest Money Now campaign says the initiative would end pay-to-play politics in Sacramento and throughout California's cities and counties.

Campaign spokeswoman Julie Soderlund said the initiative seeks to force elected officials to pay more attention to the people they serve, rather than major donors such as corporations or unions.

The campaign estimates that California legislators and constitutional officers received at least \$50 million last year in contributions from corporations and unions.

"The grassroots-driven qualification of this measure underscores the fact that Californians are sick and tired of the dysfunction caused by the outsized influence special interests maintain over politicians in our state," Shultz said in a statement.

Along with banning payroll deductions, the measure prohibits corporate and labor union contributions to candidates. Businesses will still be able to contribute unlimited amounts to

independent expenditure committees, and union members can still make contributions to political action committees directed by their labor groups.

The initiative also prohibits contractors from contributing to government officials who award them contracts, and it makes other employee political contributions voluntary. Backers of the measure have raised more than \$1.7 million, according to the most recent campaign finance report. Opponents have raised about \$737,000.

Voters rejected similar efforts billed as paycheck protection on the ballot in 2005 and 1998.

Former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger lost his fight against unions in 2005 on Proposition 75, which would have required written permission from union members to spend dues on campaigns.

In 1998, business interests funded Proposition 226, which was defeated after heavy campaigning by labor groups that opposed the requirement to get signed consent from members before spending dues money on political campaigns.

Pulaski said the current initiative goes beyond previous efforts by proposing an outright ban on collecting political funds from union members. He described the measure as deceptive because it's billed as campaign finance reform for corporations and unions when it really deprives labor of its main political funding source.

"It makes it appear as if it's balanced because it claims to ban both union and corporate contributions but really it's a sham in the sense that it does nothing whatsoever to limit corporate contributions to elections," he said.

Soderlund, the spokeswoman for the campaign, said the measure was crafted to get special interest money out of politics without violating existing laws. The U.S. Supreme Court's landmark Citizens United decision in January 2010 cleared the way for corporations to spend unlimited funds to influence elections, often using money from anonymous donors.