

Reject special election on state trust land issue

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We could not disagree more with *The Republic's* June 27 editorial "Focus shifts on trust land."

Having failed to jam through a state trust land package with few questions asked (and even fewer answered), the proponents of this so-called reform are now angling for a lame-duck special session and a spring special election. Concerned citizens and conservation groups have been working for much-needed state trust land reform for years, but cannot support this package of sweetheart deals or this method of getting them.

This proposed package includes a significant constitutional amendment - clearly the most significant relative to state trust lands since statehood. Why in the world would anyone think it is a good idea to have a number of legislators who are not returning to the Legislature - lame ducks - put this on the ballot and, even worse, put it before people in a "special election"?

When citizens propose changes to statutes via an initiative, including constitutional amendments, the law very clearly says that these must go on the next general election ballot. The intent of the law is to ensure that significant changes go before the voters when the most people go to the polls - during a general election.

Anything else could set a dangerous precedent. If the Legislature proposes this constitutional amendment in a special election, what's next? What other aspects of the Arizona Constitution would they use this, or another special election, to "reform"?

There are times when it might make sense to hold a special election for a bond or local issue. It would truly be ironic, however, if the same legislators who decided it was important to refer a sales-tax extension for Maricopa County transportation to the general election ballot, rather than for a special spring election, dismissed such concern for something as significant as a statewide constitutional amendment.

Even if you do not think our legislators have a responsibility to encourage the participation of as many people as possible in our democratic processes, you should reject the idea of a special election because of the unnecessary cost. Do we really have an extra \$3 million to \$4 million in our budget - especially when the financial impacts of this reform package are still unknown?

Irrespective of the divergent positions about the real impacts of these proposed constitutional changes (giveaways to the livestock industry, big utilities, developers and communities with the most political clout), this complex package needs a good vetting with both the Legislature and then the public.

That vetting should not be with a lame-duck Legislature, and, if the package is referred to the ballot, it should only come before the public in a general election, when the largest percentage of Arizonans vote.

Others supporting this view include Laurie Nessel, chairwoman, Maricopa Audubon Society; Don Steuter, conservation chairman, Sierra Club-Grand Canyon Chapter; Tim Hogan, executive director, Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest; Daniel Patterson, desert ecologist, Center for Biological Diversity.

John C. Horning, executive director, Forest Guardians; Karen O'Neil, chairwoman, Conservation Committee, Prescott Audubon Society; Sonja Macys, executive director, Tucson Audubon Society; Troy Hawks, vice president, Western Gamebird Alliance; Cary Meister, conservation chairperson, Yuma Audubon Society; and Kelly Burke, director, Grand Canyon Wildlands Council.

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