

Stadium measure close to OK as count continues

BY PAUL GIBLIN
TRIBUNE

The stadium proposition edged closer to the win column as county election officials continued to forge through 135,000 ballots that went uncounted on Election Night.

Friday night, the votes for Proposition 302 were 412,249, or 51.6 percent, yes; and 386,712, or 48.4 percent, no.

The final outcome probably will not be known until Tuesday, said Yvonne Reed, executive assistant to the Maricopa County recorder. The processing work is slow because each ballot must be verified and counted by hand.

Some of the votes were mail-in ballots that found their way to elections offices on Election Day. Other ballots need to be reviewed because of voter irregularities, such as name or address changes.

Arizona Cardinals vice president Michael Bidwill said he is optimistic the vote margin will continue to grow.

"We are monitoring the progress of the Elections Department and appreciate the fact that they are going to be working through the weekend," he said.

Proposition 302 is designed to increase hotel and rental-car taxes to provide most of the funding for a \$331 million football stadium for the NFL team and the Fiesta Bowl. The measure also would provide new funding for tourism promotion, spring training baseball stadiums, and youth and amateur sports facilities.

RESULT UPDATE

■ The vote results are scheduled to be updated between 5:30 and 6:30 p.m. today. The Web site address is (no www) recorder.maricopa.gov, click Nov. 2000 election, then Proposition 302. You also can get the results from the Cardinals' Web site at www.azcardinals.com on the Internet.

That the vote is close at all is dramatic, political analyst Mike O'Neil said.

Just a few weeks ago, polls showed that county voters were solidly against the stadium proposal.

Just a year ago, a previous football stadium proposal in Mesa failed by a 3-2 margin. That rejection came during a period of lingering resentment about a countywide sales tax for Bank One Ballpark that never went to a public vote.

"In this environment, getting a publicly funded stadium is quite a trip," O'Neil said. "That was a tough sell and you've got to tip your hats to them."

He attributed the turnaround to the lack of a well-funded opposition campaign and to a taxpayer-friendly funding mechanism.

AZ Wins, a political committee funded largely by the Cardinals, spent \$1.7 million in a multimedia blitz to sway voters.

A small opposition group, Valley Business Owners and Concerned Citizens, used a fraction of

that amount for its effort.

AZ Wins campaign chairman Joe Yuhas credited the apparent victory to hard work by a large coalition of supporters.

The Cardinals, Fiesta Bowl volunteers, Cactus League officials and youth sports groups all assisted in a massive person-to-person campaign, he said.

"When an election is this close, no one thing is important, because everything is important," Yuhas said.

Supporters worked the effort to the final hours. Bidwill, the team's point man for the stadium drive, spent three hours shaking hands and distributing pro-stadium literature outside a polling place on Election Day.

Cardinals political consultant Ron Ober conceded that early internal polling showed the measure lagged by 25 percent.

Campaign leaders quickly identified the components of Proposition 302 that appealed to most voters — youth sports facilities and the use of tourist taxes.

Then they emphasized those messages through television and radio commercials, and telephone and direct mail messages.

"The campaign started at a deficit," Ober said. "As people became more familiar with the total packaging and with who paid, it changed dramatically."

NFL stadium consultant Rick Horrow noted stadium and arena votes generally squeak to narrow victories. Overall, 18 of 21 major league sports tax packages have passed since 1993.

FOOTBALL

NFL
MIAMI DOLPHINS—Waived QB Mike Quinn. Signed LB Tommy Hendricks from the practice squad.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS—Re-signed WR Tony Garter to the practice squad.
HAWKEYE