

1 of 2

Stadium vote appears headed into overtime

Mail-ins may decide Prop. 302

By Shaun McKinnon
The Arizona Republic

Like the Arizona Cardinals' heart-stopping win on the field only days earlier, the team's bid for a new stadium — and perhaps its future in the Valley — remained in doubt through the final stretch of Tuesday's election.

Proposition 302 led by the narrowest of margins late into the evening, but so narrow that uncounted mail-in ballots could still affect the outcome.

Cardinals owner Bill Bidwill appeared briefly at a gathering of supporters, deferring any final comments until all the votes are in.

"I hope the momentum carries into the final votes tomorrow," he said. "I think it's been a great night for us tonight so far."

Bidwill and the Cardinals lost a stadium vote in Mesa last year, a defeat that led to the creation of Proposition 302.

Representatives of the proposed stadium's other major tenant, the collegiate Fiesta Bowl, also waited anxiously. Bowl officials say they need a bigger, better home to maintain their top-tier status in the rotating national football championship.

"We anticipated a close race and an exciting evening and we're grateful the momentum has been so positive all night," said John Junker, the bowl's executive director.

Opponents of Proposition 302, who at one point had raised barely \$300 to proponents' \$1.7 million, say they felt good about the narrow margin.

"We certainly gave them a run for their money," said David Molina, president of

Valley Business Owners and Cornered Citizens. "The closeness of the vote reflects the point of view that people are very hesitant to spend public dollars on a private enterprise."

Proposition 302 would raise \$1.8 billion over 30 years, enough to build the Cardinals a new stadium and provide money for tourism promotion, expansion of the Cactus League and youth sports facilities. The money could come from higher hotel and car rental taxes in Maricopa County, income tax revenue from the Cardinals organization and sales tax revenue from stadium events.

The Cardinals and the Fiesta Bowl also agreed to contribute a total of \$95 million.

The vote drew interest beyond Arizona's borders. San Antonio was ready to woo the Cardinals should the stadium bid fail, ordering a team of architects to look at how the city could bring the Alamodome up to standards for an NFL franchise.

The Florida winter homes of the Kansas City Royals and the Texas Rangers also were bracing for fallout from the Arizona vote. Officials for both teams have agreed to move their spring training facilities to Surprise, which has already asked the Tourism and Sports Authority to contribute to the projected \$45 million cost.

Early polls had indicated voters were overwhelmingly opposed to Proposition 302, which critics said was a dressed-up version of the Cardinals stadium proposal defeated by Mesa voters.

But deep-pocketed supporters launched a multimillion-dollar media campaign that saturated radio and television



Dave McGinnis, the Cardinals' interim head coach, shows his support for backers of Proposition 302 on Tuesday night.

with a picture that looked much different from the 1999 plan. This time, the stadium was presented as almost an afterthought.

What took center stage were the other elements: money for tourism promotion, expansion of the Cactus League, new youth sports facilities. Several ads never even mentioned the stadium.

"All the functions are interrelated," said Joe Yuhas, campaign manager for Arizona Wins. "They're all part of the largest industry in state, the tourism industry."

The campaign also trumpeted how the average Maricopa County resident would pay little or nothing toward the cost of the plan. Instead, a 1 percent hotel room tax and 3.25 percent rental car tax would generate two-thirds of the total money.

Much of the rest, supporters said, would come from fans who attend events at the new stadium, from the facil-

ity's two key tenants, the Cardinals and the Fiesta Bowl, and from income tax collected from visiting NFL players.

Proposition 302's foes accused supporters of trying to hide the stadium behind kids and creative accounting, but Yuhas and others insisted they were only educating voters about the measure's scope.

Of the \$1.8 billion raised by the measure's funding package, more than half, about \$960 million, was earmarked for stadium construction or operation. About \$250 million was set aside for tourism promotion, mainly in Maricopa County, \$194 million was to be used to help expand and nurture the Cactus League and almost \$70 million was set aside for youth and amateur sports facilities.

Reach the reporter at
shaun.mckinnon@arizona
republic.com or (602) 444-8632