

# Runner drops voting-measure lawsuit

*This story appeared in the Antelope Valley Press*

*Saturday, December 19, 2009.*

**By CRAIG CURRIER**

**Valley Press Staff Writer**

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Aimed at curbing voter fraud, the disputed Vote SAFE ballot initiative proposed by state Sen. George Runner, R-Lancaster, might appear on the ballot in 2010 after all.

Calling Attorney General Jerry Brown's revised title and summary on the proposal shaded but no longer factually incorrect, Runner has dropped the lawsuit he filed against Brown in October.

The initiative originally was titled "Limits on Voting" by Brown. The attorney general renamed it "Prohibits Voting by Those Who Fail to Provide Government-Issued Identification. Adds Additional Absentee Voting Requirements." Runner said the first title was largely inaccurate and tagged the proposal with a slew of negative terms, such as "limits" and "restricts." The second version, he said, is much closer to the measure's intended purpose.

"The first language that (Brown) gave us was absolutely factually wrong, so we were confident going into court," Runner said. "It comes down to the issue of do we have a clearer story now?"

Brown's summary still contains much of the same language it did before. It begins: "Prohibits citizens from casting a regular ballot at the polls unless they present a government-issued photo-identification card. Restricts voting by citizens who fail to present government-issued photo identification to casting only provisional ballots."

Compared to the original summary, which opened: "Prohibits citizens from voting at the polls unless they present a government-issued photo-identification card. Establishes provisional voting for citizens at the polls who fail to present government-issued photo identification," Runner deemed the changes "a step in the right direction."

While the summary accurately describes what Runner hopes to achieve, it does so by leading people with phrases that connote voter restriction rather than verification and legitimization, Runner said.

"It is shaded and still shows the bias of (Brown)," he said. "We believe we can still work through this." Runner plans to fight for clearer wording on reform measures regarding absentee ballots sent from military personnel stationed outside of California. Of every three ballots cast overseas, Runner said one does not make it in time to be counted.

The Vote SAFE initiative adds another 15 days to the time registrars may count those ballots, Runner said, but the summary indicates only that such ballots will be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day, which is the existing policy.

There is still time to push Vote SAFE through and get it on the November 2010 ballot, Runner said. But with more than 40 initiatives already seeking signatures, holding it over until the 2012 election might be the best strategy.

"While voter reform is long overdue and I am eager to see a voter ID bill passed sooner rather than later, I know from experience that if we are to accomplish our goals, we must make certain we take the time to get it done right," he said.

Runner will re-submit the initiative to the attorney general in the upcoming days, hoping to clarify the issue of military ballots. The new filing, he said, means the proposal will be ready for signature gathering in February.

[ccurrier@avpress.com](mailto:ccurrier@avpress.com)