

Calif. initiative avalanche makes signatures more valuable

By Christopher Cadelago, Sacramento Bee

The voice on the telephone recording could have been that of a stockbroker in a bull market. Instead, it was the head of a firm that collects signatures for proposed initiatives scrambling to qualify for California's November ballot.

Carl Towe's call-in service provides updates on the unprecedented and rapidly rising cost for signatures on more than one dozen measures in circulation. A 25-year veteran of the business, Towe ended a recent message with a cheery instruction to petitioners: "Make the hay while the sun shines."

This year, the light is blinding. As campaigns rush to beat their qualification deadlines, political veterans say the value of each name on the petitions voters sign, combined with the number of petitions on the street, is unprecedented.

Signatures for Gov. Jerry Brown's parole initiative are \$5 apiece. For a measure to raise the tobacco tax, \$4. For recreational marijuana legalization, \$2. Petitions in a typical year may start at \$1 and work their way up based on how they are producing.

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