

From

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State-by-State History

ARIZONA

Arizona government reforms passed by voter Initiative include changes in reapportionment (1918 and 1932), changes in the court system (1960 and 1974), and the innovative, highly successful voter registration system known as "Motor Voter" (1982), which allows applicants for driver's license renewal to simultaneously register to vote.

Arizonans owe many of their reforms to John Kromko. Kromko, like most Arizonans, is not a native; he was born near Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1940 and moved to Tucson in the mid-1960s. He was active in protests against the Vietnam War and in the 1970s and 1980s had been elected to the lower house of the state legislature several times. By night, he is a computer programming instructor; by day, he is Arizona's "Mr. Initiative."

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In 1976 Kromko was among the handful of Arizonans who, in cooperation with the People's Lobby Western Bloc campaign, succeeded in putting on the state ballot an Initiative to phase out nuclear power. The Initiative lost at the polls, but Kromko's leadership on the issue got him elected to his first term in the legislature.

Once elected, he set his sights on abolishing the sales tax on food, a "regressive" tax that hits the poor hardest. Unsuccessful in the legislature, Kromko launched a statewide Initiative petition and got enough signatures to put food tax repeal on the ballot. The legislature, faced with the Initiative, acted to repeal the tax.

After the food tax victory, Kromko turned to voter registration reform. Again the legislature was unresponsive, so he launched an Initiative petition. He narrowly missed getting enough signatures in 1980, and he failed to win re-election that year. Undaunted, he revived the voter registration campaign and turned to yet another cause: Medicaid funding. Arizona in 1981 was the only state without Medicaid, since the legislature had refused to appropriate money for the state's share of this federal program.

In 1982, with an Initiative petition drive under way and headed for success, the legislature got the message and established a Med-

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icaid program. Kromko and his allies on this issue, the state's churches, were satisfied and dropped their petition drive. The voter registration Initiative, now under the leadership of Les Miller, a Phoenix attorney, and the state Democratic Party, gained ballot placement and voter approval. In the ensuing four years, this "Motor Voter" Initiative increased by over 10 percent the proportion of Arizona's eligible population who were registered.

Kromko, re-elected to the legislature in 1982, took up his petitions again in 1983 to prevent construction of a freeway in Tucson that would have smashed through several residential neighborhoods. The Initiative was merely to make freeway plans subject to voter approval, but Tucson officials* seeing the campaign as the death knell for their freeway plans, blocked ballot placement through various legal technicalities. Kromko and neighborhood activists fighting to save their homes refused to admit defeat. They began a new petition drive in 1984, qualified their measure for the ballot, and won voter approval for it in November 1985.

Arizona's monied interests poured funds into a campaign to unseat Kromko in 1986. Kromko not only survived but fought back by supporting a statewide Initiative to limit campaign contributions, sponsored by his colleague in the legislature, Democratic State Rep. Reid Ewing of Tucson. Voters passed the measure by a two to one margin.

Kromko's Initiative exploits have made him the most effective Democratic political figure, besides former governor Bruce Babbitt, in this perennially Republican-dominated state. And Babbitt owes partial credit for one of his biggest successes—enactment of restrictions on the toxic chemical pollution of drinking water—to Kromko. Early in 1986 Kromko helped organize an environmentalist petition drive for an anti-toxic Initiative, while Babbitt negotiated with the legislature for passage of a similar bill. When Initiative backers had enough signatures to put their measure on the ballot, the legislature bowed to the pressure and passed Babbitt's bill.