

# EDITORIAL

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## These statewide ballot issues get a ‘hard no’ from us for various reasons

For the past week, we’ve been sharing insights gleaned from dozens of conversations with backers and opponents of the 14 statewide questions on Colorado’s ballot.

From the outset, we shared our general disposition to be wary of ballot initiatives; especially those that arise from a signature-gathering campaign. We tend to be a little more trusting of issues referred from the Legislature — except in cases where lawmakers are punting on an issue they could or should solve themselves.

Proposals to amend the Constitution are always suspect, but at least they have a higher threshold (at least 55% of the vote) to pass.

Following are the ballot measures that we feel are problematic, misguided or simply inappropriate for the electorate to decide with an explanation for why voters should just say no.

**Proposition 127:** *Prohibit bobcat, lynx and mountain lion hunting.*

There’s a difference between introducing a predator into Colorado’s ecosystem, as voters did with wolves, and taking stock of fair hunting practices with regard to wildcats.

Still, there are echoes of “biology by ballot box” in this proposition. Supporters of this measure have made a good argument that hunting cougars with dogs and trapping bobcats is cruel, inhumane and unnecessary from a wildlife management perspective.

We don’t disagree. But we maintain that these decisions are best left to the experts. If lawmakers or the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission want to make changes, they can. And perhaps they should if the measure fails. But we don’t think it’s a good idea to leave it up to voters.

**Proposition 130:** *Funding for law enforcement.*

Who doesn’t want to Back the Blue? This measure would direct the Legislature to appropriate \$350 million for law enforcement, training, hiring and retention and provide a \$1 million death benefit for survivors of officers killed in the line of duty.

Advance Colorado, known for fiscal conservatism and attempts to rein in government spending, is behind this citizen initiative. It’s the Legislature’s task to pass a budget that adequately covers competing priorities. When special interests use emotion to convince voters to force the Legislature to do something “more” for one group, everyone else suffers. With the state facing upwards of a \$1 billion shortfall, this measure will further hamstring the Legislature, which may be the entire point. We oppose 130 on principle, not because police and first responders aren’t deserving. Another example of how initiatives can short-circuit representative democracy.

**Proposition KK:** *Firearms and ammunition excise tax.*

This is another example of trying to leverage public sympathy for a worthy cause into a steady revenue stream.

This proposition would impose a 6.5% excise tax on guns and ammunition sales to generate \$39 million for crime victim support services. It would also fund school safety, gun violence prevention and mental health services for veterans

and at-risk school youth.

Everyone has a stake in the viability of these programs, so we oppose placing the financial burden exclusively on the backs of gun owners, the vast majority of whom are law-abiding citizens.

**Amendment 79:** *Enshrine legal abortion in the state Constitution:*

There's a sound argument to support this amendment, even though abortion rights are already protected under current Colorado law. And that's to allow government employees to have their health insurance plans cover abortion expenses, which isn't allowed under a 1984 constitutional amendment. Why should government workers be singled out? Still, we are loath to urge a yes vote on such a deeply personal and contentious issue, especially when Colorado voters have consistently supported efforts to safeguard abortion access. This issue doesn't need our endorsement.

**Amendment 80:** *Constitutional right to school choice.*

Similar to Amendment 79, Amendment 80 attempts to enshrine in the Colorado Constitution a right that already exists in statute.

One of the arguments against Amendment 80 is that the Constitution already guarantees a free public education and the state has "robust school choice laws" that allow parents to choose from many public school options, or choose to educate their children in private or home schools.

Proponents, like advocacy organization Advance Colorado, say it simply protects parents' wishes to educate their children however they see fit. But opponents warn that by defining "school choice" to include private schools, the amendment could advance the cause of school vouchers. Amendment 80 could lay the groundwork for a flurry of lawsuits as the measure, if passed, could conflict with current law prohibiting public funding for private education.

We say, it's risking a lot to enshrine in the Constitution what is already available to parents.

**Proposition 129:** *Establishing veterinary professional associates.*

Similar to the ban on mountain lion hunting, our immediate reaction to this proposition is why are ordinary Coloradans being tasked with deciding a complex question on a subject they know little about?

This is a question best left to professionals in the field. The Western Slope veterinarians we spoke to oppose it, saying it won't address worker shortages and that they have no interest in adding this position to their payrolls on liability concerns.