

# education

## The slash and burn of Proposition 107

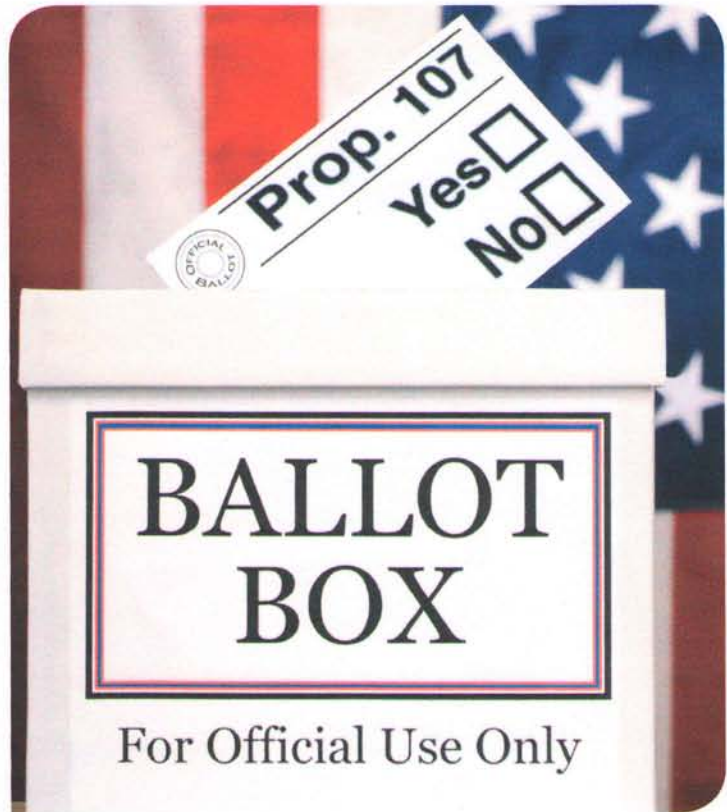
Will ending equal-opportunity programs in Arizona make everyone equal?

By Sam Naser

COME NOVEMBER 2, ARIZONANS WILL WADE THROUGH another collection of ballot initiatives, deciding the fate of 10 items that would do everything from legalize medical marijuana to make hunting a constitutionally protected right. But none of the lot promises to have as far-reaching consequences as Proposition 107, which is poised to put the the fate of our state's equal-opportunity programs to the Arizona voter. If passed, it would make them the latest casualty of the Arizona legislature's spate of political reforms, adding an amendment to the state constitution banning all race and gender-based programs administered by state and local governments.

If this all sounds eerily familiar, it should. Two years ago, California-based anti-affirmative action lobbyist Ward Connerly spearheaded a statewide effort in Arizona to gather enough petition signatures to qualify an identical initiative for the 2008 ballot. But while his campaign's grassroots approach to outlawing what he describes as "preferential policies" was perfectly legitimate, their practices were anything but. Then Secretary of State Janet Brewer ultimately axed the initiative from appearing on the ballot after 140,000 of the submitted signatures were deemed invalid.

But Connerly is a man whose persistence is not to be underestimated. In fact, his anti-affirmative action crusade is a nationwide one that's led him to successes in California and Michigan, where he helped get similar legislation passed. Connerly is also the man behind an anti-affirmative action campaign currently under way in Utah and one recently defeated in Missouri. So it was to no one's surprise when Connerly teamed up with Arizona Sen. Russell Pearce and Rep. Steve Montenegro in 2009 to green-light Senate Concurrent Resolution 1031, effectively bypassing the need for any petition signatures by having the Arizona Senate instead force the initiative



straight onto to the 2010 ballot.

The exact language of the amendment it proposes to add to the state constitution reads, "*The state shall not grant preferential treatment to or discriminate against any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education or public contracting.*"

Seems like the right stance, doesn't it? And with a ballot title like the American Civil Rights Initiative, it appears even more disarming. But while Prop 107's "no preferential treatment" clause may seem innocuous, critics say it's a Trojan horse whose passage would drastically reduce opportunities for minorities and

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women, especially in public education. Here's how.

## Prop 107 and education

Last election cycle, Connerly's anti-affirmative action campaign was pooh-poohed in certain quarters as a solution in search of a problem. That prompted

a decade, HMDP has recruited 7<sup>th</sup> grade Hispanic girls who have no prior college graduates in their families. The girls and their moms attend a class once a month at ASU throughout their eighth grade and high school years. During the classes, they participate in workshops where counselors and teachers help

## Educational programs Prop 107 could threaten:

Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program (ASU)

Multicultural Student Services Center (ASU)

American Indian Support Services (ASU)

African-American Student Affairs (UA)

Arizona Hispanic Center of Excellence (UA)

Minority Access to Research Careers (UA)

Minority Student Development Program (NAU)

Multicultural Student Center (NAU)

the conservative think tank Goldwater Institute to publish research on the extent to which race and gender "preference policies" currently exist at various levels of state government, particularly in public education. So what "preferential" policies in the public education sector did the Goldwater Institute conclude Prop 107 could jeopardize?

For one, they found no indication of any such "preference" policies regarding student admissions policies. That's because outside of the federal mandates, Arizona's state universities don't have any affirmative-action programs in terms of student admissions. But that isn't to say Prop 107's passage would not have a profound impact on enrollment of women and minorities and their access to higher education.

In fact, there are a number of student programs aimed at recruiting and retaining minority and female students to Arizona's state universities that Prop 107's passage could place on the chopping block. Take for instance Arizona State University's Hispanic Mother-Daughter program (HMDP), which nearly every East Valley Arizona school district participates in. For almost

with their self-esteem, encourage them to get involved in their communities and monitor their academic progress to ensure they're on track to graduate high school and gain admission to college. They also receive assistance in how to apply for financial aid.

Or take ASU's multicultural student center, which, while available to students of all races, explicitly tailors its services to the university's Hispanic, Asian-American and African-American students. Or the American Indian Student Support Services program, which helps American-Indian students stay in school through various retention and coordinated transition efforts. Northern Arizona University's Successful Transition and Academic Readiness (STAR) program helps incoming freshmen, who must be either a first-generation college student, in financial need or a member of an ethnic minority, make the transition to college life.

All of these programs' continued existence could be in dire straits in a post-Prop 107 Arizona. That's right, recruitment, retention and mentoring programs targeted to women or minority groups could soon become a relic of



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the past if Prop 107 passes. These are programs that encourage women interested in math and science to pursue careers in those fields. Programs that encourage people of color to enter medical careers, and programs that encourage minorities from underserved communities to become K-12 teachers. All would be legitimate targets of Prop 107's funds-slashing knife. And it's precisely the potential of Prop 107 to terminate these programs, and programs like them, that is causing many to forecast devastating consequences on female and minority student college enrollment if Prop 107 passes.

As it stands, Hispanics and African Americans are severely underrepresented at all three of Arizona's universities when compared with statewide demographics, even with equal-opportunity programs already in place. Despite the fact that Hispanics constitute approximately 39 percent of our state's total population,

attending college having increased 375 percent from 1982 to 2005, access to higher education continues to decline more than ever for minorities. And with unemployment at an all-time high, maintaining the access to higher education for these groups is essential if they are to compete on equal footing in the labor market.

"It's not good for our communities and it's not good for our economy," says Delores Grayam, chair of WE CAN! The Equality and Opportunity Committee Opposing Prop 107.

Neither Sen. Pearce nor Rep. Montenegro returned repeated calls seeking their comments on Prop 107 as of press time. However, Pearce has in the past argued in support of Prop 107, saying he believes that preferential programs send minorities a message that they are inferior and require special treatment to succeed. Rep. Montenegro has largely touted the same opinion, telling

**I'm appalled that my government thinks of me as a subclass.**

—Rep. Steve Montenegro

they represent a mere 15 percent of the student population at the University of Arizona, 12 percent at Arizona State University and 11.5 percent at Northern Arizona University. That is why terminating the few programs that do exist to help recruit ethnic minorities, and help retain them once they're in college, would be like unplugging one of their community's last lifelines to higher education.

And there's little dispute that the question of access to higher education is a critical one. With the cost of

reporters in 2009, "I'm appalled that my government thinks of me as a subclass."

So, will Prop 107 mark the end of the public treatment of women and ethnic minorities as "subclasses," as Sen. Pearce and Rep. Montenegro might say? Or will it simply mark the end of the various programs facilitating their access to higher education? That'll be up to Arizona's voting population to decide. ■

**Your thoughts?** Tell us what you think about Proposition 107. Please go to our poll at [www.latinopm.com](http://www.latinopm.com).

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