

Patterson sees shift toward death penalty

By Tim Richard
staff writer

340,000, by June 30 to allow for errors.

A confident L. Brooks Patterson sees "an explosion" of public interest in the death penalty.

The Oakland County prosecutor said his petition drive has a sudden "momentum," and the odds are "above 60-40" that his proposed constitutional amendment will be on the Nov. 4 state ballot.

"We're seeing a tremendous shift of public opinion," Patterson told a news conference Wednesday morning.

He announced that a "milestone" — 240,000 petition signatures — has been reached. State law requires 304,001 signatures by the July 7 deadline.

Patterson said he wants 100,000 more signatures, for a total of

ONLY A MONTH ago Patterson was only 50 percent hopeful that enough signatures would be collected. But recent news events have prompted requests for 26,000 petition forms. The prosecutor cited:

- A Detroit judge's comments in the conviction of the killers of a Wayne State University graduate student, his wife and 9-month-old son that the killers "should ride a lightning bolt to eternity."
- Revelations that 71 men convicted of first-degree murder were serving their mandatory life sentences, not at hard labor, but in un-fenced, minimum-security trusty camps. The list included six from Oakland County.

Democratic Gov. James J. Blanchard's remark that he supported the death penalty in certain types

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secutor George Ward's remarks that "we lock 'em up and throw away the key," Patterson retorted, "We don't lock 'em up. We treat 'em far, far too lightly."

The state Corrections Department's announcement that it would fence 13 trusty camps. Patterson called it "a day late and a dollar short."

of cases.
• The murder of 77-year-old twin sisters in Detroit.
• The murder of an Otsego County deputy sheriff.
• This week's Florida court sentencing of a Michigan man to the electric chair for a murder spree.
• A statistical study which Patterson said shows "a baby born in Detroit has a greater chance of being shot and killed than a soldier in World War II."

"I REALLY don't want to win at that cost," said Patterson, adding he would prefer to convince voters on the merits of the issue rather than see them inflamed by a homicidal bloodbath.

As evidence that interest in the drive is suddenly picking up, Patterson said:

- The Fraternal Order of Police recently picked up 10,000 petition forms.
- Life Action Ministry, a group of western Michigan churches headquartered in Niles, asked for 10,000 petition forms.
- His office phone — 858-8656 in Pontiac — is being flooded with calls from individuals who have been sent 6,000 petition forms. Waving four sheets of mailing labels, Patterson called out "Livonia . . . Westland . . . Three Rivers . . . Inkster . . . Sterling Heights."

In addition, his campaign office will send 22,000 post cards to persons who have received petitions but haven't returned them yet. Patterson encouraged them to return the forms, even if they don't have the full 15 signatures apiece.

CLOSING HIS second campaign for the death penalty, Patterson vowed that if this one failed, there wouldn't be a third. "I'll turn the files over to some young Turk and let them take over."

His 1982 campaign collected 300,000 signatures with 210,000 valid ones needed, but the Secretary of State's office ruled there weren't enough valid signatures.

If the proposal reaches the ballot, polls show that 75 percent of Michiganders would support it, he said.

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