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Marijuana Pot Legalization Signatures to be Turned in Today

By Ellis E. Conklin Thu., Dec. 29 2011 at 5:00 AM Comments (9) 

Categories: **Marijuana**

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New Approach Washington, the ACLU-backed group pushing to legalize and regulate the recreational use of marijuana, is expected today to turn in more than 355,000 signatures to the secretary of state's office. If validated, that's more than 100,000 signatures necessary for Initiative 502 to be certified.



If passed, the law will make it legal for anyone over 21 to buy up to an ounce of dried marijuana and put the state in charge of licensing and regulating it by creating a network of state-licensed growers, processors and stores. It would also impose a 25 percent excise tax at each stage.

After the certification process is complete, the initiative goes before the Legislature, whose 60-day session begins January 9. If it doesn't take action, I-502 will be placed on the November ballot.

The group's campaign director, Alison Holcomb, says she expects that the measure will at least get a committee hearing, but is not optimistic it will receive an up or down vote in the Legislature, what with a short session which will surely be devoted to dealing with the ongoing budget crisis.

Holcomb adds that New Approach Washington, whose marquee supporters include former Seattle U.S. Attorney John McKay and travel guide Rick Steves, began its signature gathering operation in August, with the help of 500 volunteers and a paid signature firm.

Win, lose or draw, I-502 **may be nothing more than a pipe dream**, and in the end, a moot point, considering that it does nothing to reconcile the fact that the federal government says pot is illegal. At the end of the day, all the initiative does is rewrite how Washington deals with marijuana and addresses it as just another restricted commodity.

Washington already has a voter-approved **medical marijuana law** that permits doctors to recommend, but not prescribe, marijuana for people suffering from cancer and other painful diseases.

Still, Holmcomb is hopeful that the measure is enacted into law, the federal government will not interfere with its implementation, just as it has not sought to challenge medical marijuana laws that **exist in 16 states**.

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