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Hazy future for medicinal marijuana dispensary

By Yvonne Gonzalez November 4, 2010 at 4:59 pm



TOO CLOSE TOO CALL: Allan Sobol, manager of the Medical Marijuana Dispensaries of Arizona and store located in Phoenix, does not see a positive future in Prop 203, legalizing medicinal marijuana, passing. With thousands of votes still to be counted, there is less than a 1 percent difference between passing and not passing. (Photo by Aaron Lavinsky)

Jars filled with a green, leafy substance line the display case of a Phoenix medicinal marijuana dispensary.

The green, leafy substance, however, is actually peat moss, and this dispensary is not yet able to distribute medicinal marijuana, said Allan Sobol, the manager of the store and Medical Marijuana Dispensaries of Arizona, a nonprofit group that supports medicinal marijuana.

The future of medicinal marijuana, and the dispensary that hopes to sell it, is still uncertain in Arizona with preliminary results of Proposition 203 showing a less than 1 percent margin separating the measure from defeat or passage.

Sobol, who is also one of the owners of Marijuana Marketing Strategies, a group that hopes to change the stereotypical image of marijuana dispensaries for Arizona, said he and other supporters of the measure were surprised by the closeness of the race.

“Right now, it’s not looking good,” he said.

There are still several thousand ballots to be counted, and the gap is currently less than 4,000 votes, according to the Secretary of State’s website.

Sobol said if the measure is defeated, the group will move on to one of several other states that will be voting on similar measures in the coming years.

Other states with pending medicinal marijuana legislation include Illinois, Massachusetts and New York, according to the public policy website ProCon.org.

“We can move everything in here except the carpet on the floor and the paint on the walls,” Sobol said. “So we’ll just take it on the road to another state.”

He said for now, if the measure is defeated, he and his marketing firm will skip over Arizona.

“They’ll probably put it back on the ballot in a couple years,” Sobol said. “We’ll be here when they do.”

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Sobol said if the law fails to pass, he will move on, but the people with severe medical conditions, like multiple sclerosis and glaucoma, would continue to suffer.

The pain associated with these conditions is treated with pain relievers that are often opiate-based. Supporters of medicinal marijuana say these medications are more dangerous than a natural pain reliever that they have to obtain through criminal means.

“What I’m really upset about is the tens of thousands of people across the state who will have to continue to deal with these medications and who may have to commit crimes,” Sobol said. “I really feel bad for them, I truly do.”

Arizona must deliver a final count of votes by Nov. 12. ASU journalism professor Steve Elliott said media outlets are not going to call the results because the margin is so close.

“However it goes, this one is close enough that there’s really no margin for a news organization in calling it until every vote has been counted or there are so few ballots out there that there’s no math possible that can provide a comeback,” Elliott said.

There are still about 374,000 ballots to be counted, including early and provisional ballots, Elliott said.

The Election Day tally leaned conservative, and the early and provisional ballots that remain to be counted will be similar to those results. Elliott said by looking at the number of votes the measure still needs, his informal prediction is that its passage is unlikely.

“I just don’t see a 7,000-vote swing out there, but there’s always a chance,” Elliott said in an e-mail.

Ballots still need to be counted in Maricopa and Pima counties. Elliott said the Pima County votes will come in first and shorten the gap, but the Maricopa County votes, which tend to be more conservative, will reverse that momentum.

Early Wednesday, the margin was about 1 percent, or 7,000 votes. By the end of the day, the gap had lessened to about 4,000 votes.

Nursing junior Jesus Nava said the loose restrictions on prescriptions in states like California should not have been a factor in this election.

“If it is regulated and it is for a purpose and it is strictly enforced, then why not?” Nava said.

Kinesiology junior Hal Veatch said a commercial he had seen where a little girl is run over by people high on marijuana was not an accurate depiction of smokers.

“I’m not a smoker, but I know a lot of people that smoke,” he said. “It’s OK as long as it’s being used for a purpose and doesn’t harm people.”

Reach the reporter at ymgonzal@asu.edu

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