



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 2, 2012

Colorado Poised for Ballot Measure to Legalize Marijuana

Getting busted for pot possession may become a thing of the past in Colorado come this November, when voters in that state decide whether or not to make the drug clear and legal for recreational use. As reported by the *Seattle Times*, Colorado joins Washington State, which in early February tallied enough signatures to place a referendum before the voters on legalizing marijuana.



If the initiative passes in Colorado, individuals 21 and older will be able to legally possess up to one ounce of marijuana for personal use. The measure would also allow residents to grow up to six marijuana plants in their home, and specially regulated stores would be licensed to sell the drug. The measure includes an option that would allow communities to ban such businesses if they desire.

While Colorado voters rejected a similar referendum in 2006, attitudes toward marijuana have been changing over the past six years, with even erstwhile conservative Americans becoming more open to legalizing what was once considered a dangerous drug. A recent Gallup poll found that around 50 percent of Americans now support legalization of pot. However, passage of the measure is far from certain. In 2010, California voters defeated a referendum to legalize recreational marijuana by 54 percent.

Reuters reported that unlike the failed 2006 measure, Colorado's 2012 referendum will create a taxation and regulatory plan. The first \$40 million in taxes will be earmarked for public schools, with the remainder placed in the state's general fund.

Mason Tvert, one of the initiative's major promoters, said he and other pot proponents would use the time before the November ballot to build a "broad base of support" for passage of the measure. "Coloradans have a chance to make history this November, and we believe they are ready to do just that," he said in a statement.

The [Denver Post](#) noted that the referendum nearly fell short of the needed petition signatures. "Proponents came up short of the required 86,105 valid signatures in their first attempt at submitting petitions," reported the paper. "Given the chance to collect more signatures, they handed in another 14,000. Nearly 7,000 of those were found valid, putting the initiative over the top."

Writing in [Time](#) magazine, author and Yale Law School instructor Adam Cohen noted that Washington State's referendum "would treat pot much like alcohol, so the sale of marijuana would be restricted to people over 21. The new law would give the Liquor Control Board the authority to license marijuana farms, and marijuana tax revenues would be directed to health and drug-abuse prevention programs."



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[Baptist Press News](#) reported that opponents of the measure “argued that legalizing the recreational usage of marijuana would lead to an increase in drugged drivers and road deaths, an uptick in marijuana’s usage among teens and young adults, and an increase in crime statewide.” Canada’s [Dalhousie University](#) released an analysis of several studies demonstrating that individuals who had used marijuana within three hours of operating a motor vehicle were twice as likely to cause a wreck. Additionally, many opponents insist that pot is a “gateway” drug that can lead users to harder drugs such as cocaine or heroin. A University of Michigan survey found that pot use among high school students is already at a 30-year high, even as alcohol consumption has decreased.

Cohen noted that up to now the debate in many states has been focused strictly on marijuana for medicinal use. “The argument that cancer patients and others with chronic pain should be able to alleviate it by using marijuana has been prevailing in state after state,” he wrote. “Today, 16 states — including Washington and Colorado — and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana for medical purposes.”

Even if the referendums fail in Colorado and Washington, proponents say the issue is not going away, and will only intensify as younger voters continue to push for legalization in other states. Presently, activists in California, Montana, and Michigan are working feverishly to get referendums on the ballots in their states. Surveys show that support for legalized pot has been rising steadily over the past 40 years, from 12 percent in 1970 to 50 percent today, with Americans age 18-29 leading the pack at 62 percent.

Cohen predicted that with such a combination of “fast-growing support and solid majorities among the young,” it appears to be just a matter of time before the national discussion turns from “whether to legalize marijuana to how to do it in the most prudent way.”



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