

Marijuana Initiative supporters meet deadline

Petitioners say they're gearing up for an ambitious, grass-roots campaign

Oregon voters will decide this year whether to allow people 18 years and older to possess or grow marijuana for personal use when they vote on the Oregon Marijuana Initiative, which will appear as Ballot Measure 5, on the Nov. 4 ballot.

The initiative qualified for the ballot after petitioners submitted more than 87,000 signatures to the state elections division on Nov. 1, 1985, although state law requires only 62,521 valid signatures for an initiative to appear on the ballot. Deadline for the signatures is July 4, 1986.

'Adults who choose to grow and consume marijuana in private should not be subject to criminal penalties... Nobody is passing a petition to legalize murder or rape or any serious crime.'

— Fred Oerther

By submitting their petition to Secretary of State Barbara Roberts' office more than six months ahead of the deadline, supporters of the OMI were assured of an early decision as to the validity of their signatures. And if Roberts' office rules that too many signatures are invalid, supporters of the initiative will be able to submit additional signatures.

Since receiving word that their initiative will be on the November ballot, OMI supporters have been gearing up their campaign.

"We know that we have to create a grass roots, precinct-level, political organization which is capable of delivering the votes," says Fred Oerther, the chief petitioner for OMI. "We're going to

register voters in unprecedented numbers. Marijuana is an issue that will cause people to register and vote," he says.

Under current state law, possession of less than one ounce of marijuana is an infraction and non-criminal in nature; selling marijuana is a class B felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison; and growing marijuana is a class A felony punishable by up to 20 years, Oerther says.

"Adults who choose to grow and consume marijuana in private should not be subject to criminal penalties," Oerther says. "Nobody

is passing a petition to legalize murder or rape or any serious crime."

The OMI proposal is not purporting to be the answer to drug abuse, Oerther says. Marijuana use has become an ingrained social custom in America, and Oerther estimates that one-third of the adults in Oregon use marijuana regularly.

But several groups from around the state are lining up in opposition to OMI. John Williams, superintendent of the Oregon Department of State Police, has voiced his opposition to OMI, although he says adults who grow marijuana in private for personal use are not sought by police.

"We don't go around searching peoples' backyards to see if they're

growing one or two plants. We just don't have the resources," he says.

Although Oerther says 20 percent of the U.S. criminal enforcement budget is spent tracking down marijuana offenders, Williams denies that legalizing marijuana would save the police money.

"The position of the state police is that we want to point out some of the harmful effects of marijuana and to dispel the notion that legalization will save us money," Williams says. "The percentage of the budget we spend in controlling commercial growing and selling of marijuana is probably less than 5 percent of our narcotics budget. That would be less than 1 percent of our overall budget."

And legalization would make marijuana much easier to attain, he says.

"All children will have to do is get a couple of plants and then they will be able to grow all they want," he says.

But Oerther calls this "unrealistic thinking."

"If you ask children now, 'Can you get drugs in school?' they will say 'yes.' And they can get all that they want, and how much more is there?" Oerther asks.

"The (OMI) will force the schools to deal honestly with marijuana and drugs. Marijuana use is not a sin or a moral defect," he adds.

But Rodney Page, the executive director of the Ecumenical Ministries, disagrees with Oerther's statements about drug education.

"I think that there is more education available today than ever before regarding the use of drugs and the evils," he says.

The Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, an organization of 15 ministries from various denominations, is preparing to issue a statement detailing its specific objections to OMI.

"We seek a society that is free from substance abuse," Page says. "I don't think that there is any responsible use of drugs."

Another possible effect of Ballot Measure 5 would push dealers out of business by allowing marijuana users to grow their own supply, Oerther says. "We want to divorce ourselves from criminal trafficking in drugs. We will do so by growing our own."

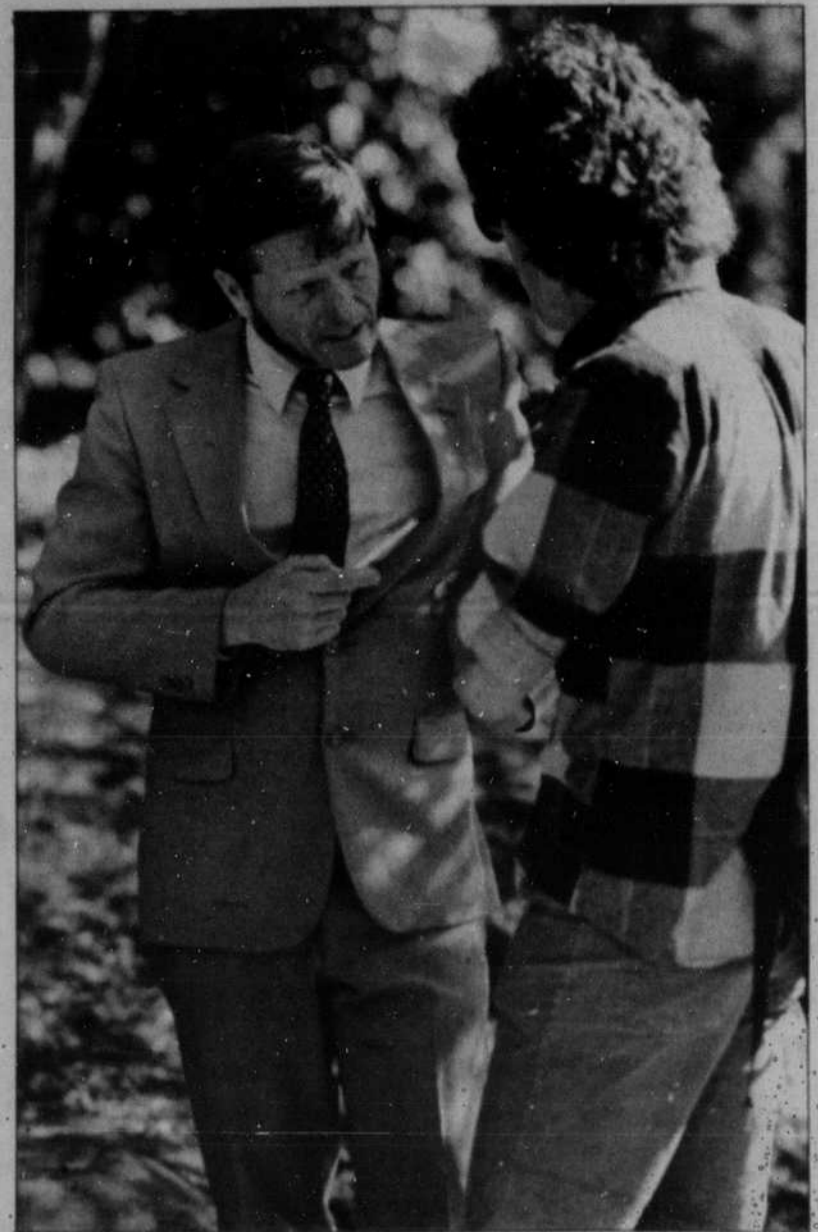


Photo by Ross Martin

Oregon Marijuana Initiative supporters were on campus earlier this fall circulating petitions to ensure the measure would have enough signatures to make it on the November ballot.

However, Williams believes marijuana growers will move into the state if OMI passes. He said the market for Oregon-grown marijuana spans the country.

And while the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws suggests that the prohibition of marijuana is unenforceable and therefore promotes disrespect for the law, Page disagrees.

"Alcohol represents a good case study in the legalization of a drug. Had people been more informed about what effect alcohol would have on our society, they may not have repealed prohibition," he says.

The OMI failed to qualify for the November 1984 ballot because then-Secretary of State Norma Paulus decided the petition contained too many invalid signatures. This caused an outcry from supporters of the initiative who claimed that Paulus' office had committed several technical errors in verifying the signatures. Initiative supporters filed suit in Oregon Supreme Court

seeking an order to put the measure on the ballot.

The Supreme Court ordered a recount of the petition signatures, which showed that an insufficient number of the signatures were valid. But Paulus acknowledged that her office as well as the state and county clerks' offices had made a series of errors in validating signatures during the first sampling.

The recount determined that 121 signatures had been erroneously invalidated in the first statistical sample, which included 5,157 signatures from the petition. Paulus said the recount had produced a 24 percent invalid rate, which is three times as high as usual.

Petitioners requested a court order forcing Paulus to either check the validity of all signatures on the petition, rather than a random sample, or put the measure on the November 1984 ballot. On Sept. 12, the Supreme Court rejected their request.

Story by Chris Norred



Emerald file photo

Doonesbury

BY GARRY TRUDEAU



LOVER! I GOT A GIG!



A GIG? YOU MEAN, A GALLERY? BETTER! A COMMISSION! I MET A GUY WHO WANTS ME TO DO THE BATHROOMS IN A CLUB HE'S OPENING ON 9TH STREET!



HE CAN'T PAY ME, BUT HE'LL THROW ME AN OPENING WHEN I'M DONE! IT'S AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY! IN FACT, I CAN ONLY THINK OF ONE DOWN SIDE...



A DOWN SIDE? TO PAINTING A TOTAL STRANGER'S TOILETS FOR FREE? YEAH. IT COULD COME OFF AS A BLATANT CAREER MOVE.

DIM SUM
Every Sunday
11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

\$1.95

Sushi Lunch Special

Dim Sum Lunch **\$2.25**

And Try Us For Dinner

CHINA BLUE
Restaurant

879 E. 13th. 343-2832

Monday, January 6, 1986