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New Health Care Initiative Petition Filed

Sponsors of an initiative petition to fund expanded access to health care for low income Oregonians today filed a new petition with the Secretary of State. Provisions of the new petition to increase the state cigarette and tobacco products tax would take effect in January, 1995 if approved by voters in the November, 1994 general election. The measure would also provide health education and prevention services to discourage tobacco use.

State taxes would increase by 25¢ per package and by 25 percent on the wholesale price of tobacco products. Initiative sponsors filed a similar petition in March that would have taken effect next January if approved by voters in November.

Late last month, the Oregon Supreme Court affirmed the ballot title for the measure, overturning legal challenges brought by tobacco industry lobbyists after the initiative was launched.

The dispute, however, caused a month-long delay in signature gathering efforts. Over 66,000 valid signatures must be submitted by July 3 for a measure to qualify for the November 1992 ballot.

"There simply is not enough time to mount an effective signature gathering effort this month," said Michael Graham, MD, one of the chief sponsors of the petition. "Tobacco industry blocked the right of voters to cast their ballot on this important public health issue this fall," he said.

Oregonians for Health Care, the committee formed by the Oregon Medical Association, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the Oregon Nurses Association and the American Long Association of Oregon, filed the new initiative petition today so that signature collection can begin later this summer.

Since the measure is virtually identical to the version upheld by the Supreme Court, expected challenges by the tobacco lobby are likely to fail again.

The two-year delay worries some sponsors. Ellen Lowe of Ecumenical Ministries said, "Deep budget cuts now being proposed could endanger the plan to bring basic coverage to more than one hundred thousand Oregonians who are too poor to afford health care for their families. We hope to collect enough signatures by spring to convince the Legislature to enact our measure. We want to get health care to people who need it now." The tobacco industry thwarted efforts to raise tobacco taxes in the last legislative session.

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Miriam Robinson is an African-American Clinical Social Worker in private practice in the downtown area, located at 1020 SW Taylor, Portland, Oregon 97205 (503)299-4951. She is a member of the Academy of Certified Social Worker, (ACSW); licensed to practice clinical social work in the State of Oregon, (LCSW); and is a member of the Oregon Board of the National Association of Social Workers. Miriam Robinson provides therapy to children, adolescents, individuals, and couples. The fees for therapy are reasonable, please call (503)299-4951 Monday thru Friday.

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