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Legalize Pot?

State effort runs counter to federal law

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Local activists are hoping to make history this fall, by making Oregon one of the first states, along with potentially California, to legalize marijuana for adult consumption. But even if their efforts are successful, the two West Coast states could find themselves in a protracted battle with the feds.

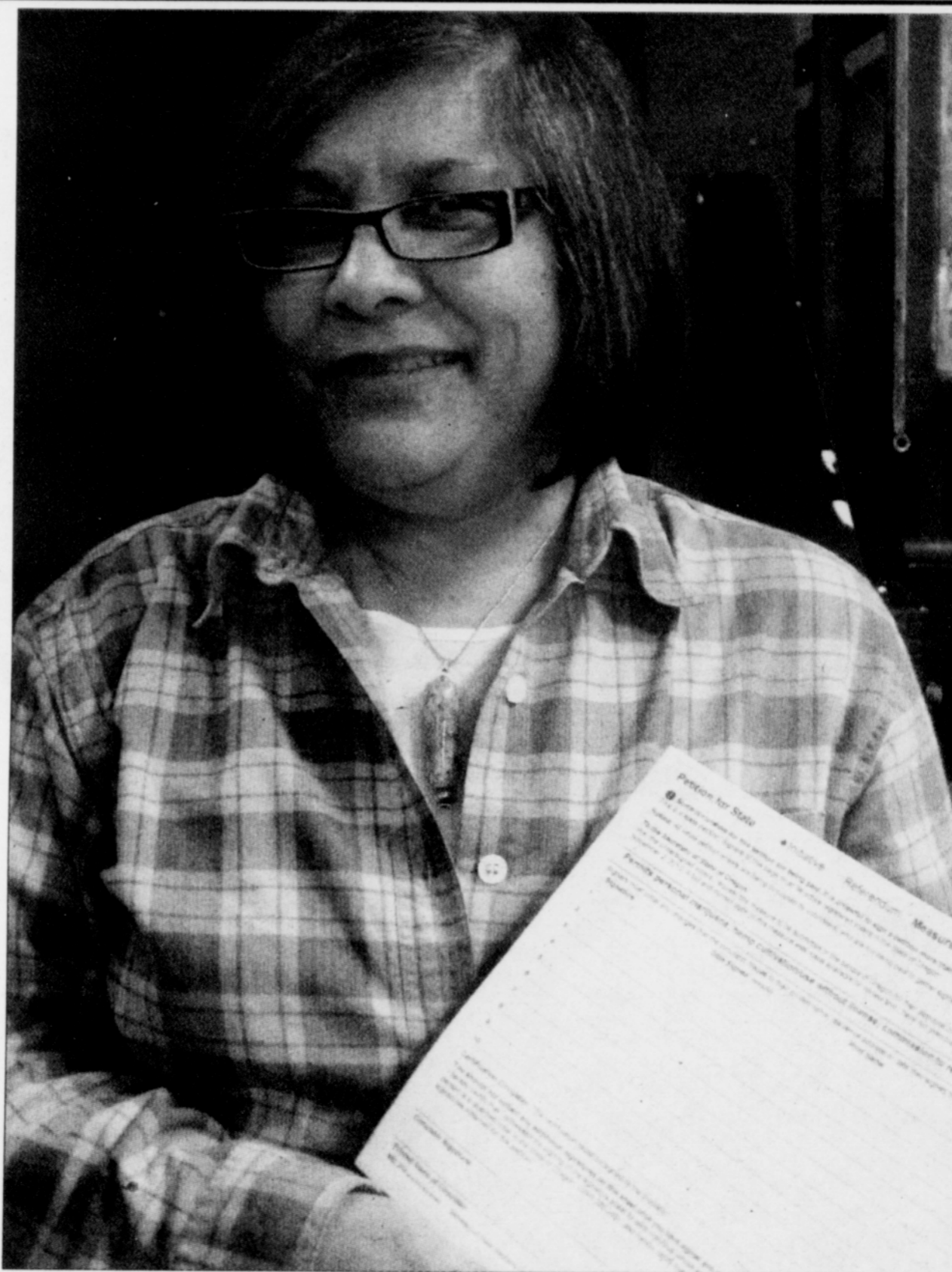
Pro-marijuana activists are currently gathering signatures for the Oregon Cannabis Tax Act for November's ballot. If passed by voters, it would set up the Oregon Cannabis Control Commission, which would oversee a network of stores that sell marijuana to any-

one 21 and up, in addition licensing growers.

Madeline Martinez, the executive director of the Oregon chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws and sponsor of the petition, estimates that if the initiative passed, the sale of cannabis will generate about \$140 million annually for the cash-strapped state, basing her numbers on an economic analysis of a similar ballot measure in California that has already qualified for the ballot.

According to a survey conducted in 2005 by the Office of National Drug Control Policy,

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Madeline Martinez, the executive director of the Oregon chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, holds a petition for a ballot initiative to legalize marijuana in Oregon.

Marijuana Work Ruling Stands

It appears that there will be no appeal to an Oregon Supreme Court decision last month that ruled that laws protecting disabled workers don't apply to medical marijuana patients, thereby allowing employers to fire employees who use the drug.

The case originated when a Eugene man who was fired from his job as a drill press operator after he revealed to his employer he was taking medical marijuana to treat a disability. He filed a complaint with the Bureau of Labor and Industries, a state agency dedicated to protecting workers rights.

BOLI sued, taking its case all the way up to the Oregon Supreme Court. The court mentioned in its opinion the conflict between federal and state law, but ruled against the bureau by deciding that federal laws prohibiting marijuana use trumped state laws.

Bard Avakian, who heads BOLI, stated last week that he doesn't plan on appealing the ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"Dragging out the legal process would benefit neither workers nor employers," said Avakian in a prepared statement, who hopes to work with Oregon's business community.



The Cascade Job Fair at Portland Community College's north Portland campus has become an important link for a college system that is accommodating an influx of new students brought on by a high unemployment rate.

Surging Enrollment at PCC

Portland campuses feel the pressure

Enrollment at Portland Community College shows no sign of slowing down.

Spring has recorded the 11th consecutive term of growth for the college system, with the Cascade campus in north Portland the Rock Creek campus in northwest Port-

land feeling the pressure of the influx of students the most

Core full-time credit enrollment, or known as FTE, at PCC gained 16.9 percent this spring term and by 9 percent in total headcount compared to enrollment numbers last year at this time.

In the last two years, the college has grown by 20.5 percent in total headcount and 39 percent in FTE. The two-year numbers are significant because the FTE numbers determine how much money PCC gets

from the state's community college funding formula, established every Oregon biennium budget cycle.

Total headcount for the spring is 41,364 (an increase of 3,413 from spring 2009) and 8,646 in FTE (increase of 1,247 from a year ago), according to the college's fourth-week winter enrollment report the standard week for reporting enrollment figures).

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