

Voters approve statewide ballot measures

Campaign finance reform, tobacco tax, clinical ‘magic’ mushrooms, decriminalized drug possession all pass

By Nick Budnick
Oregon Capital Bureau

All four statewide ballot measures were approved on Election Day. Voters supported campaign finance reform, increased tobacco taxes and clinical use of psilocybin, while voting to approve a measure to decriminalize possession of hard drugs such as methamphetamine.

Campaign finance reform
Measure 107 passed with 78.4% of the vote. It will amend the state Constitution to make it clear that campaign contributions can be capped. A 1997 Oregon Supreme Court ruling threw out limits on free-speech grounds, but in 2016 and 2018 voters in Multnomah County and Portland, respectively, approved local contribution limits to raise the issue again. After lawmakers referred the measure to the ballot, in

April the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the county’s limits — but the ballot measure aims to set out the legal lay of the land clearly. Polls have shown overwhelming support for campaign contribution limits, so the outcome is not a surprise. Supporters raised barely more than \$170,000 to support the measure. The campaign faced little opposition outside of ballot arguments against filed by the Taxpayers’ Association of Oregon and Kyle Markley, the Libertarian candidate for Secretary of State.

Tobacco taxes
Measure 108 also passed, with 66.4% of the vote. The measure will raise Oregon’s cigarette tax to \$2 per pack, a 67-cent boost over the current tax, and raise the per-cigar tax from 50 cents to \$1. It also will extend the tax to vaping products such as electronic cigarettes. The Oregon Health Authority will use the money to fund health care for low-income people as well as on programs aimed at tobacco-related diseases. Products for tobacco-use cessation and for marijuana vaping are exempt from the measure. The increased tax puts Oregon on

par with rates in California and Washington, and will take effect Jan. 1. Supporters raised more than \$13.5 million — far outstripping opponents, who raised a mere \$7,000. It’s a huge contrast from 2007, when major tobacco companies spent what was then a record of \$12 million to defeat an 85-cent tax increase. Opposition arguments were filed by the Taxpayers Association of Oregon and Eric Fruits, a vice president of the Cascade Policy Institute, a free market think tank in Portland. “We are proud to be part of this extraordinary effort to protect health care for the 1 in 4 Oregonians who rely on the Oregon Health Plan for coverage and save lives through vaping and tobacco reduction and prevention,” said Lisa Vance, chief executive for Providence Health & Services-Oregon, of the results.

Therapeutic ‘magic’ mushrooms
Measure 109 won with 55.7% of the vote. It makes Oregon the nation’s first state to allow limited therapeutic use of psilocybin, a psychoactive ingredient found in “magic” mushrooms. Under Measure 109, people will

pay for the mushrooms, which are subject to a state tax set at 15% of the retail price. They will be barred from taking them home, instead using them at licensed locations. Unlike legal marijuana, the measure permits no marketing. Supporters argued that psilocybin may help with mental health issues, such as addiction or depression stemming from advanced cancer. And studies are underway. But opponents, such as the Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association contend that psilocybin has not been established as a safe treatment. Supporters raised nearly \$3.5 million to support the measure, most of it from New Approach PAC, a Washington, D.C., political action committee that favors drug policy reform. There is no single campaign committee in opposition to the measure. The Advance Liberty committee opposes all four statewide ballot measures, but spent little. As he celebrated with sponsors, Portland-based therapists Tom and Sheri Eckert, the campaign manager for Yes on 109 hailed the victory. “All eyes are on Oregon over the next two years as we develop this pro-

gram,” Sam Chapman said. “I’m sure we’ll be hearing from California and Washington and New York and Colorado (and) Florida after this.”

Decriminalizing hard drugs
Measure 110 also passed, garnering 58.5% of the vote. It decriminalizes hard drugs and direct funds for addiction treatment. The measure makes Oregon the first state to decriminalize personal-use amounts of methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, oxycodone and other hard drugs, levying fines instead. It downgrades possession of larger amounts from a felony, carrying a state prison sentence, to a misdemeanor punishable by less than a year in a local jail. The measure shifts marijuana tax revenues away from schools and into drug treatment. Supporters of the measure raised about \$3.5 million, most of it from the New York-based Drug Policy Alliance. Opponents raised nearly \$150,000 and spent about \$75,000. In addition to former Gov. John Kitzhaber and 25 of Oregon’s 36 district attorneys, plus the associations of sheriffs and police chiefs, some treatment providers opposed the measure.

Dems sweep races for secretary of state, treasurer and attorney general

By Peter Wong
Oregon Capital Bureau

Democrats swept the three statewide offices up for election in Oregon. Democrat state Sen. Shemia Fagan of Portland earned 50.4% of the statewide vote in her bid for Oregon secretary of state. Republican state Sen. Kim Thatcher of Keizer had 43.2% of the vote. In the race for state treasurer, Democratic incumbent Tobias Read of Beaverton won 51.8% of the vote. Republican Jeff Gudman of Lake Oswego had 41.5%. Incumbent Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum of Portland, a Democrat, had 56% to 41.3% for Republican rival Michael Cross of Turner. Fagan, 39, is a lawyer who served two terms in the Oregon House, left in 2016, then returned to politics two years later, when she unseated Democrat Rod Monroe in the District

24 seat in the Oregon Senate. Her seat will be filled by appointment for the two years remaining in the term. The secretary of state is the chief elections officer — although elections are conducted by Oregon’s 36 counties — overseer of audits and custodian of records. The office is next in line of succession to the governor. Read, 45, formerly worked for Nike and was in the Oregon House for five terms until his election as treasurer four years ago. He earned a bachelor’s degree from Willamette University and a master’s in business administration from the University of Washington. Rosenblum, who turns 70 on the day her third term starts in January, faced two opponents who are not lawyers. Cross, a truck driver from Turner, led an unsuccessful effort to force a recall election against Gov. Kate Brown in 2019. Lars Hed-

bor, who also ran as the Libertarian nominee four years ago, is a technical writer and author from Beaverton. All 17 attorneys general in Oregon history, dating back to the creation of the office in 1891, have been

lawyers, although it is not a legal requirement. The attorney general is Oregon’s chief legal officer and represents state government in state and federal courts. But most criminal prosecutions are

initiated by district attorneys in the 36 counties. The Department of Justice has about 1,400 employees and a two-year budget exceeding \$650 million. Under the Oregon Constitution, the secretary of

state and the state treasurer — along with the governor — are limited to two consecutive terms. The attorney general has no term limits. The new terms start Monday, Jan. 4.

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