

Ohio Torpedoes Marijuana Legalization, Takes Inevitability Myth Down With It

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A Joe-Camel like superhero, “Buddie,” touring Ohio colleges, cities, and towns in the “Green Rush Bus”; an estimated \$25 million war chest; paid canvassers knocking on one million doors; and 8,200 TV ads as of mid-October couldn’t persuade Ohioans to legalize marijuana.

The Ohio Marijuana Legalization Initiative, known as Issue 3, which would have legalized pot for both medical and recreational use, went down to resounding defeat by an almost 2 to 1 margin in yesterday’s elections. With all precincts reporting, the unofficial vote total is 64 percent (1,959,802) against, 36 percent (1,094,289) for.

The ballot measure did not win a single county in the state.

Issue 3 Proponents

Issue 3 was conceptualized by Ian James, a Columbus political consultant whose company specializes in collecting signatures for ballot initiatives. Under the name, Responsible Ohio, James persuaded ten wealthy individuals to form investment groups, contributing a minimum of \$2 million each to finance Issue 3.

In exchange, each group would own one of a maximum of ten marijuana cultivation sites in the state. Because ballot initiatives in Ohio amend the state’s constitution, if passed Initiative 3 would have granted a constitutional monopoly to its sponsors for the commercial production of marijuana in Ohio.

(Critics note that James’s company earned some \$5 million to collect signatures and run the Responsible Ohio campaign.) An investigation of signature irregularities, including turned-in signatures of a number of dead people, is underway.

A Counter Initiative

Legislators drafted a counter initiative, Issue 2, to prevent monopolies from being inserted into the state’s constitution. Voters passed Issue 2 by 52 percent to 48 percent, making yesterday’s election a double win for opponents.

Issue 3 Opponents

Ohioans Against Marijuana Monopolies, who opposed Issue 3, brought together some 140 different organizations, including “medical, legal, banking, law enforcement, chambers of commerce, political entities, trade unions, and mental health and addiction agencies,”

according to *USA Today*. (Most of the organizations and their contact information are listed on the Links page of The Marijuana Report's website.)

In contrast to Responsible Ohio's \$25 million bank account and thousands of TV ads, opponents raised about \$1 million and by mid-October were able to place only 31 ads on TV. Instead, coalition organizations used their internal communications networks, held news conferences, and sponsored public debates to warn voters against the dangers of legalizing marijuana in their state.

Spin vs. Reality

Like legalization proponents in Colorado in 2012, Responsible Ohio promised that by 2020, \$540 million in tax revenues would be raised each year with 85 percent going to safety agencies and 15 percent going to regulatory agencies.

But such predictions aren't turning out to be true. In a CNN interview just a few weeks ago, Colorado Governor Hickenlooper told Michael Smerconish, "I tell other governors that we are not making any extra revenue from pot sales beyond regulating the industry, making sure we have money for the appropriate programs, and money to educate kids."

"We've got to make sure that kids and their parents understand that when your brain is still growing, this high THC marijuana can permanently diminish your long term memory," he continued. "We have spent millions and millions of dollars and we still haven't got everyone to realize that you are taking some serious risks, certainly as a teenager when your brain is growing so rapidly."

Misleading Polls

A week before the election, the University of Akron issued a new poll showing that Ohio voters were evenly split on Issue 3: 46 percent for, 46 percent against, 8 percent undecided. The poll came nowhere close to how the election turned out: 36 percent for, 64 percent against.

A day before the election, Ethan Nadelmann, executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance, a major force behind the legalization movement, told *The New York Times*, "If Ohio wins, it will be a significant step forward for the broader movement—nothing will excite attention like that."

Today, trying to downplay yesterday's defeat in Ohio and its implications for legalization elsewhere, Christopher Ingraham writes in *The Washington Post*, "Given the trends in national polling on marijuana legalization – support was nearly 60 percent in the latest Gallup poll, up sharply year-over-year – it doesn't appear the issue will be going away any time soon."

But Ohio shows that legalization proponents' faith in polls may not be well-placed.

So, is legalization inevitable? Probably not. To quote an old saying about the bellwether state, "As Ohio goes, so goes the nation."

This analysis is drawn from a number of press reports, including:

Ohio Legends Hit Airwaves to Promotes Cannabis Measure..

Ohio Voters Reject Legal Pot, Pass Anti-Monopoly, Redistricting Measures..

Ohio Voters Evenly Divided on Legalizing Marijuana.

On Ballot, Ohio Grapples With Specter of Marijuana Monopoly.

Ohio Voters Say No to Legalizing Drugs.

Ohio Just Rejected Legalizing Marijuana. What That Means for the Future of Pot.