

Public debate of Ballot Measure 2 will help Alaskans weigh marijuana legalization

Peg Tileston, August 3, 2014, Commentary in the Alaska Dispatch News

OPINION: Ballot Measure 2 centers on a public policy issue that creates interest, emotion, and confusion, and a free public discussion can help voters consider their choice in November. Should Alaska become the third state in the U.S. to legalize recreational marijuana

The marijuana legalization initiative, Ballot Measure 2, "An act to Tax and Regulate the Production, Sale, and Use of Marijuana," will be on the Nov. 4 general election ballot. This ballot measure centers on a public policy issue that creates interest, emotion and confusion. If passed, Alaska will be the third state to legalize the production, sale and use of marijuana.

What is the initiative really about? The proposed act is lengthy – eight pages long, consisting of three sections, which would add 17 new statutes and a severability clause to Alaska law. It would make the use of marijuana legal for persons 21 years of age or older. The bill would allow a person to possess, use, buy and grow set amounts of marijuana but would ban public use of marijuana. The bill would make the manufacture, sale and possession of marijuana accessories legal. It would create marijuana establishments including marijuana retail stores, marijuana cultivation facilities, marijuana infused product manufacturers and marijuana testing facilities. The bill would allow localities to ban marijuana establishments but would not prohibit private possession and home cultivation. The bill would require regulations and

provide for regulatory oversight, and would establish an excise tax of \$50 per ounce on the sale or transfer of marijuana from a cultivation facility to a retail store or marijuana product manufacturing facility.

What might be the effects if Ballot Measure 2 passed? What might be the outcome if the measure fails?

The marijuana legalization initiative is a multifaceted issue. Some questions include:

- What might be the effects of legalizing marijuana on youth and rural Alaskans?
- Will marijuana legalization improve life and economic opportunities for Alaskans?
- What are the costs to develop regulations and administer the program, and costs to law enforcement?
- What are the estimated tax revenues?
- What is the experience of legalizing marijuana in Colorado and Washington?
- Should we wait to see how it goes in Colorado, Washington and perhaps other states before Alaska legalizes marijuana?

Alaska Common Ground is hosting a free public forum on the marijuana legalization initiative. The forum will present a balanced panel with experts discussing the pros and cons of the initiative. There will be ample opportunity for the public to ask questions of the experts. Veteran Alaska broadcaster Steve MacDonald will moderate the forum.

Panelists supporting the initiative will be Bill Parker, a sponsor of the initiative, a former legislator and a former deputy commissioner of the Alaska Department of Corrections. He will be joined by Taylor Bickford, a spokesman for the organization "Campaign to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol in Alaska."

Panelists opposing the initiative will be Deborah Williams and Kristina Woolston, both with the organization "Big Marijuana. Big Mistake. Vote No on 2."