

Anti-Marijuana Campaign Outspends Question 300 Support 11-to-1

Colorado Springs Anti-Marijuana Campaign Outspends Proponents 11-to-1 in Heated Election

In Colorado Springs, the debate over recreational marijuana sales has led to a fierce battle in both campaigning and spending, with the group opposing recreational cannabis outspending its opponents by a remarkable 11-to-1 margin. This issue, a pivotal one in the city's upcoming election, revolves around two ballot measures: Question 300, which would allow recreational marijuana sales at businesses that already hold a medical marijuana license, and Ballot Measure 2D, a proposed ban on recreational marijuana aimed at curtailing future citizen-led efforts to introduce it in Colorado Springs.

The Colorado Springs Safe Neighborhood Coalition (CSSNC) is leading the campaign against Question 300 and in favor of Ballot Measure 2D. According to the city's Nov. 1 campaign finance reports, the coalition has spent nearly \$1.1 million to encourage voters to reject recreational marijuana sales. The coalition's considerable financial influence, much of it reportedly from real estate and construction industry donors, has raised questions about the motivations behind the opposition campaign.

Question 300 vs. Ballot Measure 2D: A Divisive Issue

Question 300, if approved, would permit the sale of recreational marijuana at establishments that already operate with a medical marijuana license. Supporters argue that this measure would stimulate local economic growth, generate tax revenue for the city, and offer residents easier access to regulated cannabis products. However, this proposal has met strong resistance from conservative groups and businesses worried about the potential social impact of expanded marijuana sales.

On the other hand, Ballot Measure 2D, the opposing proposal, seeks to block any future efforts to introduce recreational marijuana in Colorado Springs. If passed, this measure would effectively close the door on recreational marijuana sales within city limits, a move that proponents say would protect public safety and community standards. The debate has polarized the city, and the financial disparities between the opposing sides are stark.

The Role of the Colorado Springs Safe Neighborhood Coalition

The Colorado Springs Safe Neighborhood Coalition (CSSNC) is leading the charge against recreational marijuana sales in the city. The group reported raising more than \$1.2 million in total contributions during this election cycle, with nearly \$1.1 million already spent as of Oct. 27. Much of the financial backing for CSSNC has come from construction companies, real estate developers, and other business groups, with many donors enforcing zero-tolerance drug policies within their organizations.

According to Daniel Cole, head of the opposition campaign, the coalition's supporters are driven by a desire to preserve the safety and health of Colorado Springs. "Our donors are contributing out of a sense of social responsibility," Cole stated. He described the coalition's mission as part of a larger effort to maintain Colorado Springs as a safe, family-friendly community.

The Influence of Colorado Dawn: A Nonprofit Powerhouse

A significant share of the CSSNC's funding—\$835,000—has come from Colorado Dawn, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization. As a "dark money" nonprofit, Colorado Dawn is not required to disclose its individual donors, allowing for contributions to flow in anonymously. Notably, Colorado Dawn shares an address with other ventures connected to Cole, raising questions about the transparency of the funding sources backing the anti-marijuana campaign.

Cole maintains that Colorado Dawn's contributions come from a broad range of sources and are part of the nonprofit's annual spending on various community initiatives. While some opponents of recreational marijuana sales support CSSNC for workplace safety reasons, others emphasize broader social concerns, fearing that an increase in marijuana access could impact community health and public safety.

Industry Support for CSSNC: A Focus on Workplace Policies

The financial support from construction and real estate companies is likely tied to concerns about workplace safety. Despite Colorado's legalization of recreational marijuana, many contractors and developers enforce zero-tolerance policies for cannabis, in part due to a 2015 Colorado Supreme Court ruling. This ruling upheld employers' right to maintain strict drug-free policies regardless of state legalization laws, making cannabis consumption off-limits for employees in certain industries.

For contractors and other labor-intensive professions, cannabis use—regardless of legality—can raise safety concerns, particularly in roles involving heavy machinery or hazardous work environments. As a result, companies with stringent drug policies may view recreational marijuana legalization as a risk to both workplace safety and business liability.

The Financial Disparity: Outspending the Opposition

The CSSNC's substantial spending has dwarfed that of the pro-Question 300 campaign. The nearly \$1.1 million that CSSNC has poured into campaign efforts highlights the extent of the financial divide between the two camps. Proponents of recreational marijuana sales in Colorado Springs have raised only a fraction of the funds available to the coalition, making it difficult to compete with the reach and visibility that the CSSNC can afford in its advertisements and outreach.

This significant financial imbalance has allowed the CSSNC to dominate the campaign, using extensive media coverage, advertisements, and community events to influence public opinion. By contrast, the pro-marijuana sales camp, operating on a smaller budget, has had to rely on grassroots efforts and local advocates to make its case to the voters.

Public Sentiment and Voter Considerations

The fierce spending and campaigning reflect the polarized public sentiment surrounding marijuana sales in Colorado Springs. While cannabis is already legal in Colorado, the possibility of expanding recreational sales into Colorado Springs has drawn mixed reactions from residents. Advocates of Question 300 argue that the city stands to benefit from the added tax revenue, which could fund public projects and city services. They

also point out that recreational marijuana sales would bring in customers from other regions, potentially boosting local businesses.

On the other side, those in favor of 2D fear the potential consequences of increased cannabis accessibility. Critics of recreational sales argue that legalizing marijuana sales in Colorado Springs could lead to a rise in drug-related incidents, addiction rates, and impaired driving. For families and residents concerned with the city's safety and reputation, 2D represents a preventive measure to maintain the status quo.

The Power of “Dark Money” in Local Politics

The significant financial role played by Colorado Dawn has drawn attention to the influence of dark money in local politics. Because 501(c)(4) organizations are not obligated to disclose their donors, these nonprofits can channel large amounts of money into campaigns while shielding the identities of their contributors. This has led to questions about transparency, with some residents concerned that anonymous donations could be shaping important city policies without sufficient public accountability.

The CSSNC's reliance on funds from Colorado Dawn has underscored the impact that anonymous donations can have on local issues. In this case, the money has allowed CSSNC to dominate the narrative surrounding recreational marijuana sales in Colorado Springs, highlighting the broader issue of how “dark money” can influence the outcome of municipal elections.

Potential Outcomes and Long-Term Impact

As Election Day approaches, Colorado Springs residents are weighing the arguments for and against recreational marijuana sales. A vote for Question 300 would align the city's cannabis policies with much of the state, while approval of Ballot Measure 2D would cement a long-term ban on recreational sales. Whatever the outcome, the election is set to have lasting implications for Colorado Springs, influencing its economy, public safety, and community identity.

If Question 300 passes, the city could experience a surge in revenue and job creation, drawing in cannabis tourism and expanding the city's tax base. However, should 2D succeed, Colorado Springs will likely maintain its conservative stance on cannabis, distinguishing itself from other Colorado cities that have embraced recreational sales.

A Decisive Moment for Colorado Springs

The campaign over recreational marijuana sales in Colorado Springs highlights the complexity of local policymaking in a state that has embraced cannabis legalization. While some residents see economic potential and growth in the cannabis industry, others worry about the potential social costs. With millions of dollars fueling both sides of the debate, the decision ultimately rests in the hands of Colorado Springs voters, who will determine the city's future approach to marijuana sales and community standards.