

Maine, Maryland Approve Same-Sex Marriage by Popular Vote

Altering the course of U.S social policy, Maine and Maryland became the first states to approve **same-sex marriage** by popular vote, while Washington state and Colorado set up a showdown with federal authorities by legalizing recreational use of marijuana.

The outcomes for those ballot measures Tuesday were a milestone for persistent but often thwarted advocacy groups and activists who for decades have pressed the causes of gay rights and drug decriminalization.

"Today the state of Washington looked at 70 years of marijuana prohibition and said it's time for a new approach," said Alison Holcomb, manager of the campaign that won passage of Initiative 502 in Washington.

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, a Democrat who opposed legalization, was less enthused. "Federal law still says marijuana is an illegal drug, so don't break out the Cheetos or gold fish too quickly," he said.

The results in Maine and Maryland broke a 32-state streak, dating to 1998, in which gay marriage had been rebuffed by every state that voted on it. They will become the seventh and eighth states to allow **same-sex couples** to marry.

In another **gay-rights victory**, Minnesota voters defeated a proposed constitutional amendment that would have banned same-sex marriage in the state. Similar measures were approved in 30 other states, most recently in North Carolina in May.

"The tide has turned—when voters have the opportunity to really hear directly from loving, committed same-sex couples and their families, they voted for fairness," said Rick Jacobs

of the Courage Campaign, a California-based gay rights group. "Those who oppose the freedom to marry for committed couples are clearly on the wrong side of history."

Washington state also voted on a measure to legalize same-sex marriage, though results were not expected until Wednesday at the soonest.

The outcomes of the marriage votes could influence the U.S. Supreme Court, which will soon consider whether to take up cases challenging the law that denies federal recognition to same-sex marriages. The gay-rights victories come on the heels of numerous national polls that, for the first time, show a majority of Americans supporting same-sex marriage.

Maine's referendum marked the first time that gay-rights supporters put **same-sex marriage** to a popular vote. They collected enough signatures to schedule the vote, hoping to reverse a 2009 referendum that quashed a gay-marriage law enacted by the Legislature.

In Maryland and Washington, gay-marriage laws were approved by lawmakers and signed by the governors this year, but opponents gathered enough signatures to challenge the laws.

Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley, who campaigned vigorously for the marriage measure, spoke to a jubilant crowd in Baltimore. Christopher Wold, 31, danced with his partner of four years after the result became clear. He said they would like to marry now that it's legal in Maryland.

"It feels so good to be accepted by so many people of all different backgrounds," he said. "It just feels wonderful."

The president of the most active advocacy group opposing same-sex marriage, Brian Brown of the National Organization for Marriage, insisted Tuesday's results did not mark a watershed moment.

"At the end of the day, we're still at 32 victories," he said. "Just because two extreme blue states vote for gay marriage doesn't mean the Supreme Court will create a constitutional right for it out of thin air."

Heading into the election, gay marriage was legal in six states and the District of Columbia—in each case the result of legislation or court orders, not by a vote of the people.

The **marijuana measures** in Colorado and Washington will likely pose a headache for the U.S. Justice Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration, which consider pot an illegal drug. The DOJ has declined to say how it would respond if the measures were approved.

Colorado's Amendment 64 will allow adults over 21 to possess up to an ounce of marijuana, though using the drug publicly would be banned. The amendment would allow people to grow up to six marijuana plants in a private, secure area.

Washington's measure establishes a system of state-licensed marijuana growers, processors and stores, where adults can buy up to an ounce. It also establishes a standard blood test limit for driving under the influence.

The Washington measure was notable for its sponsors and supporters, who ranged from public health experts and wealthy high-tech executives to two former top Justice Department's officials in Seattle, U.S. Attorneys John McKay and Kate Pflaumer.

"Marijuana policy reform remains an issue where the people lead and the politicians follow," said Ethan Nadelmann of the Drug Policy Alliance, which opposes the co-called "war on drugs." "But Washington state shows that many politicians are beginning to catch up."

Estimates show pot taxes could bring in hundreds of millions of dollars a year, but the sales won't start until state

officials make rules to govern the legal weed industry.

The Washington measure was opposed by Derek Franklin, president of the Washington Association for Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention.

“Legalizing is going to increase marijuana use among kids and really create a mess with the federal government,” Franklin said. “It’s a bit of a tragedy for the state.”

In Oregon, a marijuana-legalization measure was defeated. In Massachusetts, voters approved a measure to allow marijuana use for medical reasons, joining 17 other states. Arkansas voters rejected a similar measure.

In all, 176 measures were on the ballots Tuesday in 38 states, according to the Initiative and Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California.

Other notable results:

- Maryland voters approved a measure allowing illegal immigrants to pay in-state college tuition, provided they attended a state high school for three years and can show they filed state income tax returns during that time. About a dozen other states have similar laws, but Maryland’s is the first to be approved by voters.
- In Oklahoma, voters approved a Republican-backed measure that wipes out all affirmative action programs in state government hiring, education and contracting practices. Similar steps have been taken previously in Arizona, California, Michigan, Nebraska and Washington.
- In Michigan, labor unions suffered a big loss. Voters rejected a first-of-its-kind ballot initiative that would have put collective bargaining rights in the state constitution.

Contributing to this report were Brian Witte in Annapolis, Md.; Nicholas K. Geranios and Gene Johnson in Seattle; Clarke Canfield in Portland, Maine, and Kristen Wyatt in Denver.

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