

FORUM

EDITORIAL

No, Issue 1 would not align Ohio with other states' rules

Contrary to what its backers suggest, State Issue 1 would make it much tougher for Ohioans to amend their state constitution than it is for voters in most of the other states with citizen-initiated amendment powers. That is, Issue 1 won't conform Ohio's rules with other states'; Issue 1 would make Ohio an outlier.

Statehouse Republicans are pushing Issue 1 precisely because it would get in the way of voter-petitioned constitutional amendments in Ohio by making it much harder to get an amendment on the ballot in the first place — then requiring 60% approval rather than the current simple majority.

For a legislature that has failed to pass a single new ethics law in the wake of the House Bill 6/FirstEnergy/Larry Householder racketeering scandal, putting up roadblocks for citizens trying to check a legislature beholden to special interests is precisely what Statehouse insiders want.

They want to make it much harder for voters to pass any future citizen-initiated amendments, whether on abortion, gerrymandering or other topics.

Since 1912, passage of a citizen-initiated state constitutional amendment has required “yes” votes from a majority of voters casting ballots on the question. Backers of Issue 1 falsely suggest the 50% requirement makes Ohio an exception — an easy-passage exception — among the 17 states that grant voters the power to initiate proposed state constitutional amendments.

That's not true: Only three of the 17 states (Colorado, at 55%, and Illinois and Florida at 60%) require more than simple majority statewide votes for all citizen-initiated constitutional amendments. There are butts: Colorado allows a constitutional provision to be repealed with a majority vote. Illinois lets a measure pass if it gets a simple majority vote as measured against all voters casting ballots in that election, not just on that issue. Florida requires a 66% margin for new taxes, but 60% on all other constitutional amendments.

Among the other 14 states, Arizona requires a 60% vote only for tax hikes; all other amendatory measures require a simple majority. Nevada requires passage by a majority vote in two successive elections.

Oregon, interestingly, requires a supermajority vote only when it's “equal to any supermajority voting requirements in a proposed amendment,” cleveland.com's Andrew J. Tobias reports, citing the National Conference of State Governments.

In other words, if Oregon's requirement were in effect in Ohio, Issue 1's passage would need 60% of the vote, not just the simple majority its backers hope for.

But a majority vote versus a 60% vote isn't the most egregious Issue 1 comparison point with other states.

Issue 1 would also make it much harder to petition for constitutional amendments in the first place.

Ohio's current requirement has two prongs: First, the total number of signatures must equal at least 10% of the total votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election. Currently that number, based on the 2022 governor's race, is 413,487 signatures. (The 10% requirement doesn't change under Issue 1.) Additionally, signatures equal to 5% of a county's gubernatorial vote must be gathered in 44 counties.

Issue 1 would significantly toughen the rules for gathering sufficient signatures. First, Issue 1 would extend the 5% requirement to all 88 counties, arguably giving voters in even tiny counties the opportunity to roadblock amendments before they ever could reach the statewide ballot. No other state requires voter signatures from every county to qualify proposed amendments for the ballot, Tobias reports.

Then, under current Ohio law, if petitioners fail to turn in enough valid signatures, they're allowed a 10-day “cure period” to collect additional signatures. Issue 1 would abolish the cure period.

All told, Tobias recently reported, the Issue 1 signature requirements would impose “one of the biggest roadblocks in the country for citizens who want to change their state constitutions. Some critics say it would make it a near impossible task to qualify for the ballot, much less win 60% of the vote.”

Issue 1 is a solution in search of a problem, cooked up by Statehouse insiders to defang the citizen initiative powers Ohioans have had for 111 years to check a corrupt legislature. It also would extend to proposed constitutional amendment ballot issues the same curse that extreme gerrymandering imposes in the legislature: rule by a political minority.

Voters who want a voice on Issue 1, make note of two upcoming dates:

- ▶ This Monday, July 10, is the last day to register to vote or update registrations for the Aug. 8 special election.
- ▶ And early, in-person voting begins the next day, Tuesday, July 11.

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COMMENTARY FROM THE COMMUNITY

We have Alberta fires to blame as COVID memories are rekindled

Cliff Anthony

With apologies to people with the name “Alberta”: Alberta has struck again!

The northwestern Canadian province, which is notorious for pummeling us with below-zero Alberta Clippers during the winter, spewed wildfire smoke on its southern brethren last week. Alberta accounted for 624 wildfires out of Canada's 3,020 wildfires as of July 1, according to Canada's National Wildland Fire Situation Report.

About one-third of the U.S. population inhaled the acrid air that smelled like burned rubber and plastic, worse than burned toast, prompting health officials to declare “Code Red.”

So far this year, fires in Alberta and British Columbia have burned more than 11.6 million acres, “the most land on record so early in the season,” the Washington Post reports.

Many pulmonologists have warned people in the United States, especially senior citizens and asthma patients, to stay indoors — or to wear facial underwear reminiscent of the dreaded COVID-19 days. Lucky are the ones who hid their KN95 masks from their spouses during their spring cleaning.

Remember the harrowing two years when we were asked to mask up, stay 6 feet away from others and use hand sanitizers even if we didn't touch anything? We were also told to wash our hands for the duration of humming “Happy birthday to whomever.”

Hardly had I thrown my hands up in the air celebrating liberation from the pandemic-forced quarantine than Alberta sent a smoke signal: “Not so fast, pal.”

Last week's wildfire smoke was the second of its kind to hammer U.S. cities this year.

It is hard to overlook the similarities between the Alberta smoke's health warnings and COVID-19. We were urged to cut down on outdoor activities and holiday travels, unless you went south. Many public events were canceled.

Local farm teams for the team formerly known as the Indians — the Lake County Captains and the Akron RubberDucks — canceled games, and Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne's much-anticipated first State of the County address had to be postponed.

We were advised to tone down the July Fourth fireworks, lest the smoke from the fireworks mix with the Canadian smoke, further polluting the air and sending people to emergency departments. (FYI: The emergency room, or ER, is now known as an emergency department, or ED.)

Like the winter morning smog in the San Francisco area, the thick, smoke-laden air obscured many city skylines, from Chicago to New York, like the parched pho-

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COMMENTARY FROM THE COMMUNITY

Winding down assistance, without harm

Philip E. Cole

During the most difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic, Congress acted to deal with the virus and its effects. Temporary service programs were created.

While most of us know success is best achieved if we focus on the result we want, it appears no one asked what would happen to the people served by these programs when the pandemic was declared over and the services ended.

If we do not plan for the end of a program, its success or failure is a roll of the dice; it will succeed for some and not for others.

Congress does not want “temporary” to become “forever” — no one does — but legislative bodies rarely think past the crisis. They never ask, “When the program ends, then what?”

In the early stages of COVID, many lower-wage workers were laid off or had their hours reduced. We know that, for many people, loss of income became the inability to pay for rent, utilities, food, and other things. These problems remain.

Tough times have consequences and consequences outlast their cause. For example, I left my backyard gate open and the consequence was that my dog ran away. I closed the gate, yet an hour later I was still looking for my dog.

COVID is no longer be an emergency, but people still struggle with joblessness, inflation, rent increases, etc. With those problems remaining, simply declaring “time's up, COVID's over” and terminating the programs without a plan leaves many in worse shape than when COVID began.

For example, consider the Emergency Rental Assistance program. Most federal funding phases of ERA will soon end in Ohio. For many, their rents soared during the pandemic. If a family is recovering from the consequences of COVID, especially a job loss, the abrupt ending of ERA will mean eviction for many struggling families. Before ERA began, many who had lost their jobs



A vendor sells face masks outside a souvenir store in New York on June 7 as haze from Canadian wildfires blankets the city. Yuki Iwamura, Associated Press

tos in archives. The weather pundits filled the airwaves with Alberta stories, as they had during the winter with reports of teeth-chattering minus-15-degree wind chill blown from the Canadian province (population: about 4.4 million).

Believe it or not, Alberta boasts 600 freshwater lakes. It was fascinating to see the weather maps on TV resembling a coloring book. They were dotted with blobs of vibrant hues, representing various degrees of bad air quality.

Purple blobs represented the highest in the air-quality health warning meter. Ironically, purple “is often associated with royalty, nobility, luxury, power, and ambition. Purple also represents wealth, extravagance, creativity, wisdom, dignity, grandeur, devotion, peace, pride, mystery, independence, and magic,” a number of shopping websites, revealed by a Google search, declare.

Alberta kept meteorologists busy, explaining arrows that swirled clockwise and counterclockwise like the flip-flopping statements by elected officials.

For a brief period, the cable networks' breaking news didn't include the U.S. Department of Justice's investigation of former President Donald Trump, his lawsuits and countersuits. We can thank Alberta for that.

Anthony is the author of the upmarket fiction “Tears in God's Own Country.” He lives in Highland Heights.