

## Tax amendment, phone service petitions verified

■ The state spending amendment still may face legal challenges from opponents of the proposal.

By TODD ANDERSON  
Senior staff writer

Supporters of two major ballot initiatives had reason to cheer last week as their validated petitions were received by Secretary of State Scott Moore.

But with approval just around the corner, more legal challenges might be ahead for a proposed constitutional amendment to limit the growth of state spending.

By last Wednesday, all 93 Nebraska counties had turned in verified petitions for the spending initiative, as well as a proposal to cut long-distance telephone rates, according to Moore's office.

By unofficial counts, both petitions gathered enough signatures to appear on the Nov. 3 election ballot.

Supporters and opposition groups will have an opportunity to verify the numbers submitted by the counties before the final numbers are certified in September.

The group for the state spending amendment proposal originally submitted 181,565 signatures. Of those, 125,156 proved to be valid.

At least 105,292 were required to place the proposed constitutional amendment to limit the growth of state spending on the ballot.

In addition, the petition required 5 percent of voters from at least 38 Nebraska counties. Sixty-five counties met the requirement.

The spending petition, written and submitted by a group of Nebraska business leaders, would cap state and local tax rates according to a formula allowing for population and cost-of-living increases.

The group argues that state spending has increased too fast since the 1970s, once population growth and inflation rates are accounted for.

Extra state revenues would have to be returned to taxpayers through cuts in rates of sales and income taxes.

Craig Christiansen, chairman of Nebraskans for the Good Life — the main group opposing the spending proposal — said he doubts his group will question the validity of the signature because of the large number that would have to be disqualified.

Instead, he said, his group plans to file a second round of legal challenges claiming unconstitutionality because of the length of the proposal.

Both the Nebraska Supreme Court and the Lancaster County District Court have overturned earlier challenges because they were prematurely filed.

Moore's office also received 85,813 valid signatures in favor of an initiative to reduce the fees that long-distance telephone companies charge out of 125,493 originally submitted.

The proposed state law, supported by AT&T, needed 73,704 signatures to be included on the November ballot.

## Coalition prepares attempt to defeat state tax measure

By BRIAN CARLSON  
Staff writer

Opponents of a proposed constitutional amendment to limit the growth of state tax revenue are preparing a grass-roots effort to defeat the initiative, which they say would weaken government services and hamper efforts at property tax relief.

Nebraskans for the Good Life, a coalition of organizations opposed to the amendment, recently hired Craig Christiansen, former president of the Nebraska State Education Association, to lead its effort.

Backed by a group of business leaders and taxpayer advocates, the amendment would limit the growth of the state's spending.

Christiansen said the amendment could cause dangerous levels of underfunding for education, police and fire departments and other government services, making it more difficult to provide property tax relief.

"The primary problem with this amendment for Nebraskans is that it essentially ends property-tax relief efforts in the state," he said.

The requirement that surplus state revenue be returned through sales and income tax cuts would deplete resources available for state aid to schools and local governments, Christiansen said. That in turn would cause local governments in need of additional revenue, he said, to increase their only available source of funding — property taxes.

Christiansen also said the amendment's

exemption of college tuition from the limits in revenue growth would force state colleges and universities to increase tuition to compensate for lost state funding.

Nebraskans for the Good Life already has launched one unsuccessful legal challenge to the amendment. The group argued before the Lancaster County District Court that the 3,450-word amendment violates state law limiting petitions to one subject.

The court ruled that this challenge would have to wait until the secretary of state's office announced the amendment would appear on the ballot.

Christiansen said Nebraskans for the Good Life would mount another court challenge at that time.

One of the member organizations of Nebraskans for the Good Life is the University of Nebraska-Lincoln chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

The group's president, UNL horticulture Professor Dave Lewis, said the organization thinks the amendment would not safeguard any level of education in Nebraska.

"We feel it would be detrimental to the development and continued growth of higher education and education in general," he said.

Christiansen said Nebraskans for the Good Life would have considerably less funding available than the amendment's proponents, but would rely on word of mouth, grass-roots campaigning and eventually television advertisements to spread its message.

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