Ohio Ballot Board approves ballot language for recreational marijuana law. Read it here

Haley BeMiller
Columbus Dispatch

The Ohio Ballot Board approved ballot language Thursday for a proposal to legalize recreational marijuana that will go before voters in November.

The statute, if passed, would legalize, regulate and tax adult-use marijuana in addition to the current medical cannabis program. The Republican-controlled board unanimously backed the draft language with little fanfare after clashing over what voters will see for the proposed abortion rights amendment.

The proposed marijuana law will be known as State Issue 2.

The measure is an initiated statute, which means the Legislature could modify or repeal the law if it passes in November. Gov. Mike DeWine and Senate President Matt Huffman, R-Lima, are staunchly opposed to adult-use marijuana, but advocates have said they expect lawmakers to respect the will of the voters.

What would the recreational marijuana law do?

The proposal would allow Ohioans age 21 and older to buy and possess 2.5 ounces of cannabis and 15 grams of concentrates. They could also grow up to six plants individually and no more than 12 in a household with multiple adults.

Products would be taxed 10%, with revenue going toward administrative costs, addiction treatment programs, municipalities with dispensaries and a social equity and jobs program.

The initial round of licenses would go to growers, processors and dispensaries in the medical cannabis program. A certain number of cultivator and dispensary licenses would be reserved for participants in the social equity program, which aims to help those who are disproportionately affected by the enforcement of current marijuana laws.

Two years after the first adult-use licenses are issued, the state will determine if more should be authorized.

Haley BeMiller is a reporter for the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau, which serves the Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and 18 other affiliated news organizations across Ohio.

Ballot language set for Ohio abortion issue. Democrats call wording unfair and inaccurate

Jessie Balmert
Cincinnati Enquirer

Ohio Republicans approved ballot language for a reproductive rights measure on the Nov. 7 ballot that emphasizes terms like "unborn child" and minimized any limits on abortion. Democrats decried the wording as unfair and inaccurate.

Language approved at a Thursday meeting included lines such as: "The proposed amendment would always allow an unborn child to be aborted at any stage of pregnancy, regardless of viability if, in the treating physician's determination, the abortion is necessary to protect the pregnant woman's life or health."

The measure will be Issue 1 on the Nov. 7 ballot.

Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose, a Republican running for U.S. Senate to replace Democratic incumbent Sherrod Brown, leads the board. LaRose was a vocal proponent of an August ballot measure that would have made it harder to amend the state constitution, also called Issue 1.

The proposed amendment would prevent the state from banning access to abortion, contraception, miscarriage care and other reproductive decisions. Abortions could be prohibited after fetal viability, typically about 22 to 24 weeks gestation, unless one is required to save the pregnant patient's life or health.

Opponents of the measure are already sparring with its backers over what the constitutional amendment would and would not do. Opponents say the measure would eliminate parental consent currently needed for abortions, impact gender-affirming care for transgender teens and allow abortions late into pregnancy. Proponents say that's not true.

The proposal's backers had asked the Ohio Ballot Board to give voters the full amendment and let them decide.

“As written, the full text of the proposed amendment is clear, concise and direct: The voters of Ohio will be best served by the ballot language presenting the actual full text of the proposed amendment," wrote attorney Don McTigue, who represents the ballot campaign.

Rep. Elliot Forhan, D-South Euclid, said the Republican language reflects personal viewpoints, using terms like “unborn child” instead of “fetus.”
Democrats on the ballot board attempted to substitute this language but their motion was rejected along party lines.

This story will be updated.

Jessie Balmert is a reporter for the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau, which serves the Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and 18 other affiliated news organizations across Ohio.

Who came out on top in the GOP primary debate? Here’s what experts say.

Nikki Haley got plenty of praise from veteran Republican consultants and advisers.

Kelly Garrity
Politico

Mike Pence talked for longer than any other candidate. Vivek Ramaswamy tangled with several opponents while burnishing Trump-like conservative values. Chris Christie slammed Ramaswamy, while Nikki Haley jabbed at Trump and the rest of her party over the country’s ballooning federal debt.

Some candidates left the stage Wednesday night reinvigorated, while others fizzled under the spotlight. But who “won” and “lost” in the first Republican presidential primary showdown is still up for debate. So we asked the experts to weigh in:

Who gained the most ground?

“Haley,” Mike Murphy, a veteran GOP consultant who headed up the Jeb Bush-aligned super PAC in 2016, said in an email. Her performance “should jump start her flagging fundraising and give her a media bump which she really really needs.”

Murphy also praised Pence, who he said “has an uphill road” but showed “strength and character.” Plus: “[H]e speaks the language of the pro-life movement better than anybody else.”

Kevin Madden, a GOP communications guru who served as a senior adviser to Mitt Romney in 2008 and 2012, agreed.

“Nikki Haley had the strongest debate,” Madden, who also worked as a campaign spokesperson for George Bush in 2004, told POLITICO in an email.

“She has a really strong, natural political talent with audiences, and the debate stage allowed her to showcase that,” Madden added, dubbing her the winner of a battle with Ramaswamy over his stance on Ukraine and U.S. foreign policy.

Stuart Stevens, a longtime GOP ad-maker and a former Romney adviser, was less optimistic about the field.

“Joe Biden” gained the most ground, he said in an email. “One of his best debate nights.”

Who lost the most ground?

That would be Tim Scott, Murphy and Madden said.

For Scott, the night was “a big missed opportunity,” Murphy said.

Madden said: “He seemed tentative in one of his biggest tests among the klieg lights of a national campaign. He warmed up as the debate went on, but this performance wasn’t enough to generate any real, grassroots momentum.”

According to Stevens, DeSantis suffered the biggest letdown. The Florida governor and reigning No. 2 in the polls should’ve directed his attacks at Biden, offering himself as the only candidate with the chops to take on the incumbent Democrat, Stevens said.

Biggest moment of the night?

Haley and Pence both had big moments, these experts said — though which moment differs depending on who you ask.

“Nikki Haley had the best moment of the debate when she squared off with Ramaswamy,” Madden said, while “Ramaswamy picking a fight with former Vice-President Pence certainly caught the MAGA crowd’s attention.”

Haley’s blaming Republicans for running up the national debt was also notable, Stevens said, though only “because it will appear in a million Democratic commercials.”

What about Trump?

What was most notable about the way the candidates onstage addressed Trump was that they overwhelmingly didn’t.

“Trump barely existed in this debate, which is a mixed bag for Trump,” Murphy said. “He almost seemed irrelevant.”

While Christie, who has pitched his campaign as an effort to keep Trump out of the White House for a second term, did get in some digs at the former president, “for the most part, the field was either tentative or uninterested in addressing Trump," Madden said. "This was a missed opportunity, though, since each candidate at least took to the stage in an effort to earn the support and trust of primary voters, while Trump ignored that opportunity. If you're running because you believe you're the best person for the job, and you're better than Trump, then you need to say that loud and clear in a forum like this."

Arizona Labor Spat Signals Challenges for U.S. Chip Manufacturing

Unions object to plans by TSMC to bring workers from Taiwan to speed up work on new facilities

Yuka Hayashi and Yang Jie
Wall Street Journal

A labor tussle at a semiconductor-plant construction site in Arizona points to one of the thornier challenges facing the U.S. as it moves to revive domestic chip manufacturing: ensuring there are enough skilled workers to meet new demands.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. is investing $40 billion for two chip fabrication plants in Phoenix and is expected to seek up to $15 billion in tax credits and grants for the project under the $53 billion Chips Act, The Wall Street Journal has reported.

Meeting those goals will hinge not only on drawing the world's biggest chip manufacturers to the U.S., but also recruiting and developing the technical expertise to build and operate the new plants. In Arizona, however, construction has been delayed by a shortage of skilled workers, TSMC says, and it is seeking to bring in workers from Taiwan to get construction back on track.

"We are encountering certain challenges as there is an insufficient amount of skilled workers with…specialized expertise," TSMC Chairman Mark Liu said during the company's July 20 second-quarter earnings call.

Liu's remarks drew a sharp rebuke from Arizona trade unions, who say bringing in workers from overseas would undermine one of the key goals of the Chips Act—to create more domestic jobs in the industry.

"TSMC has shown a lack of respect for American workers," the Arizona Building and Construction Trades Council said in a letter to members of Congress, asking them to block the issuance of visas to Taiwanese workers. Around 1,500 members sent copies of the letter to Washington.

The council is an umbrella organization for 14 trade unions representing pipe fitters, electricians, metals workers and others. The group's members make up 25% to 30%

of about 12,000 workers currently on the Phoenix site, said spokeswoman Brandi Devlin.

TSMC says its intention was to bring in workers on a temporary basis and it wasn't seeking to cut Arizona workers out of jobs.

"This small group of experienced specialists will share experience and exchange knowledge with the locals, enabling the larger objective to localize the U.S. supply chain," TSMC said.

TSMC has sought visas for roughly 500 temporary workers, according to people familiar with the situation.

A State Department spokeswoman wouldn't confirm that number, but said officials there are working with TSMC "to ensure employees with the skills required to construct and operate complex semiconductor fabrication plants representing an array of companies and subsidiaries have the opportunity to apply for U.S. visas expeditiously and efficiently."

The Biden administration considers the Chips Act one of its signature initiatives, and the program's supporters responded quickly following the complaints by the Arizona Building and Construction Trades Council.

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, visited the construction site on Aug. 9 to announce what she called a voluntary agreement with TSMC to allow state officials to increase inspections and training to ensure worker safety. She also pledged to double the number of construction and trades apprentices.

"Arizona will work tirelessly to train the workforce," she said.

Industry executives and economists say a shortage of chip-industry workers in the U.S. is a big hurdle as the U.S. seeks to entice Asian chip makers that dominate global semiconductor supplies, and who enjoy deep pools of skilled workers and lower production costs at home.

"The Chips Act is doing exactly what it was meant to do: Bring in new investment and expand U.S. production capacity," said Hamilton Galloway, head of consultancy for Americas at Oxford Economics, a research firm. "Now we have to rise to the challenge of the workforce needs and the talent in order to support that outcome."

A study conducted by Oxford and the Semiconductor Industry Association projects the industry will face a shortage of roughly 67,000 workers by 2030, as the Chips Act spurs expansion. Of those unfilled jobs, 39% will be technicians mostly with two-year degrees, 35% will be engineers and others with four-year degrees and the rest holding advanced degrees.

Biden administration officials say the labor tension in Arizona doesn't reflect a current shortage of semiconductor workers.

"Companies from across the world are investing in America because they know we have the best engineers, scientists and workers in the world," White House spokeswoman Robyn Patterson said. She added universities, community colleges and companies are expanding training of semiconductor workers to meet growing talent needs.

Union members had previously took to social media to complain about TSMC bringing in nonunion workers from Texas and Louisiana to work on the Arizona project. They have also questioned the company's safety standards and communication style.

TSMC, which provides nearly all of the U.S.'s needs for most advanced chips, has complaints of its own. These include high building costs in the U.S. and the Chips Act's restrictions on expanding its existing facilities in China.

In response to the Arizona situation, TSMC said it now holds regular discussions with labor contractors about safety and training, as well as the use of foreign workers, to set up the factories.

Devlin, the union spokeswoman, said the company's pledges to hold regular conversations have helped allay concerns.

"We feel that there is a process now in place that we can address some of these issues," Devlin said.

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China Is on Edge as Fallout From Its Real Estate Crisis Spreads

Beijing wanted to cool its housing market, but created a bigger problem, as the fallout from debt-laden developers and sinking sales spreads to the broader economy.

Daisuke Wakabayashi and Alexandra Stevenson
New York Times

A model Chinese real estate developer in a sector replete with risk takers is teetering on the edge of default. Short of cash, one of China's biggest asset managers has missed payments to investors. And billions of dollars have flowed out of the country's stock markets.

In China, August has been a dizzying ride.

What started three years ago as a crackdown on risky business behavior by home builders, and then an ensuing housing slowdown, has spiraled rapidly this month. The broader economy has been threatened, and the confidence of consumers, businesses and investors undermined. So far, China's typically hands-on policymakers have done little to ease anxieties and seem determined to reduce the country's economic reliance on real estate.

"What is happening in the Chinese property market is really unprecedented," said Charles Chang, who heads corporate credit ratings for Greater China at Standard & Poor's.

For the last three decades, as China's population surged and its people flocked to cities seeking economic opportunity, developers couldn't build modern apartments fast enough, and the real estate sector became the engine of a transforming economy. Real estate employed millions and provided a store for household savings. Today, the sector accounts for more than a quarter of all economic activity.

China's dependence on real estate was lucrative during what seemed like a never-ending building boom, but it has become a liability after years of excessive borrowing and overbuilding. When China was growing faster, the excesses were papered over as developers borrowed more to pay off mounting debts. But now China is struggling to regain its footing after emerging from the paralyzing pandemic lockdowns its leaders imposed, and many of its economic problems are pointing back to real estate.

Chinese consumers are spending less, in part because a slump in housing prices has affected their savings, much of which are tied up in property. Jobs tied to housing that were once abundant — construction, landscaping, painting — are disappearing. And the uncertainty of how far the crisis might spread is leaving companies and small businesses afraid to spend.

Local governments, which rely on land sales to developers to pay for municipal programs, are cutting back on services.

Financial institutions known as trust companies, which invest billions of dollars on behalf of companies and rich individuals, are staring at losses from risky loans handed out to real estate firms, prompting protest from angry investors.

The crisis is a problem of the government's own making. Regulators allowed developers to gorge themselves on debt to finance a growth-at-all-costs strategy for decades. Then they intervened suddenly and drastically in 2020 to prevent a housing bubble. They stopped the flow of cheap money to China's biggest real estate companies, leaving many short on cash.

One after another, the companies began to crumble as they could not pay their bills. More than 50 Chinese developers have defaulted or failed to make debt payments in the last three years, according to the credit ratings agency Standard & Poor's. The defaults have exposed a reality of China's real estate boom: the borrow-to-build model works only as long as prices keep going up.

As the crisis has worsened, Chinese policymakers have defied calls to step in with a major rescue package. They have opted instead for modest gestures like relaxing mortgage requirements and cutting interest rates.

In an editorial on Friday, the state-run Economic Daily said it would take time for recent policies to take effect: "We must be soberly aware that the process of defusing risk cannot be completed overnight, and the market must give it a certain amount of patience."

Policymakers have tolerated the fallout of the real estate crackdown because even the companies that are not able to pay all their bills have continued to build and deliver apartments.

China Evergrande, for example, defaulted on $300 billion of debt in 2021 and yet managed to finish and deliver 300,000 apartments out of the more than one million that it had taken money for but not completed at the time of its collapse. Evergrande filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States on Thursday.

But a lot has changed in recent months. Households pulled back on big purchases, and apartment sales plummeted. That shock altered the fortunes of Country Garden, a real estate giant that was once put forward as a model by the government. The company is now anticipating a loss of as much as $7.6 billion in the first half of the year and says it is facing the biggest challenge to its business in its three-decade history.

Country Garden has just weeks to come up with the cash to make interest payments on some of its bonds or join its peers in default. It also has hundreds of billions of dollars in unpaid bills.

These developments have spooked home buyers, who were already wary. In July, new-home sales at China's 100 biggest developers fell 33 percent from a year earlier, according to data from the China Real Estate Information Corp. Sales also fell 28 percent in June.

Investors worry that policymakers are not acting quickly enough to prevent a bigger crisis.

"I don't think they have yet found the right solution to solve the problems," said Ting Lu, chief China economist for Nomura. He and his colleagues have warned that falling home sales and defaulting developers risk a chain reaction that threatens the broader economy.

The fears have spread to other markets. In Hong Kong, where many of China's biggest companies are listed, confidence has plunged so drastically that stocks have fallen into a bear market, down 21 percent from their peak in January. Over the last two weeks, investors have pulled $7.5 billion out of Chinese stocks.

The real estate troubles are also spreading to China's so-called shadow banking system of financial trust companies. These institutions offer investments with higher returns than standard bank deposits and often invest in real estate projects.

The latest troubles surfaced earlier this month. Two publicly traded Chinese companies warned that they had invested money with Zhongrong International Trust, which is managing about $85 billion in assets, and said that Zhongrong had failed to pay the companies what they were owed. It was not clear that those investments were tied to real estate, but Zhongrong had been a major shareholder in several projects of developers in default, according to the South China Morning Post. Zhongrong did not respond to an email seeking comment.

A crowd of angry Chinese investors gathered outside the Beijing offices of Zhongrong, demanding that the company "pay back the money" and calling for an explanation. It was not clear when the protest took place; videos of it were uploaded to Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, this month.

The demonstration was reminiscent of other acts of defiance in China rooted in the housing crisis. Such occurrences are rare, but there are a few recent examples.
Image

In February, thousands of retirees in Wuhan confronted officials to protest cuts in government-provided medical insurance for seniors. The cutbacks were a sign of the strain on local governments caused in part by the downturn in real estate that had hurt land sales, a reliable source of revenue.

Last year, hundreds of thousands of homeowners refused to pay mortgages on unfinished apartments. Some staged protest videos on social media, while collectives of homeowners tracked boycotts online.

Both protests drew notice, but the momentum petered out as the government intervened to limit discussion on social media, while adopting some steps to ease tensions. Last week, a new video outside Zhongrong's offices showed no demonstrations but police cars and vans were parked in and near the facility.

Claire Fu and Li You contributed reporting.