

Group behind Ohio Issue 2 gets boost from marijuana industry ahead of Nov. 7 election

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The group behind an effort to legalize recreational marijuana in Ohio is easily out-raising its opponents in the final stretch of the campaign – thanks largely to the industry itself.

The Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol brought in nearly \$1.2 million through Oct. 18, according to state campaign filings released Thursday. Nearly \$700,000 of that came directly from cannabis companies that stand to benefit from an adult-use market, and several CEOs made individual donations as well.

The coalition mistakenly reported two donations totaling \$275,000 as "unknown" but plans to correct its filing, spokesman Tom Haren said.

Ohio voters will decide Nov. 7 whether to pass Issue 2, which would allow adults 21 and older to buy, possess and grow marijuana. The proposed law would impose a 10% excise tax on marijuana products, with revenue going to multiple state funds and municipalities with dispensaries.

The coalition opposing Issue 2, Protect Ohio Workers and Families, raised nearly \$343,000 during the same time frame. Some of the group's biggest donors are business organizations that have sounded the alarm about how marijuana could affect the workplace.

"Is anybody surprised that a \$30 billion industry that includes the company that gave us the Marlboro Man is outspending the people fighting to keep our kids, workplaces and highways safe?" said Scott Milburn, a spokesman for Protect Ohio Workers and Families.

Opponents have so far spent about \$230,000 on their campaign. Backers of Issue 2, meanwhile, spent over \$818,000 on advertising, campaign literature, legal services and other costs.

Neither campaign has been particularly active – especially compared to groups on both sides of Issue 1 – and their low spending reflects that. The Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol put digital ad spots on Facebook, but Haren could not immediately say whether any ads have appeared on television.

Protect Ohio Workers and Families has yet to broadcast ads, opting instead to use digital and social media.