

After voters back abortion and pot, GOP leaders signal plans to undermine referendums

By Jake Zuckerman
cleveland.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Mere hours after polls closed with Ohio voters decisively backing abortion access and the use and sale of recreational marijuana, two top Statehouse Republicans floated the notion of chipping away at or altering both measures.

As of about 10:30 p.m., a [constitutional amendment establishing a right to abortion access passed](#) 55.5% to 44.5%. [Marijuana passed](#) by roughly 56% to 44%, per [preliminary results](#).

Regardless, House Speaker Jason Stephens and Senate President Matt Huffman – both of whom oversee broad Republican majorities in the General Assembly – suggested plans to chip away at Ohioans’ new rights.

On abortion, Stephens said in a statement that the state legislature has “multiple paths that we will explore to continue to protect innocent life.” This loss, he added, is “not the end of the conversation.”

Huffman, via a spokesman, made similar remarks.

“This isn’t the end. It is really just the beginning of a revolving door of ballot campaigns to repeal or replace Issue 1,” he said.

On marijuana, Huffman said lawmakers “may consider” amending the new state law to “clarify the questionable language regarding limits for THC and tax rates as well as other parts of the statute.” Stephens suggested lawmakers would alter how tax revenue from marijuana sales is allocated.

“Investing in county jail construction and funding law enforcement training across Ohio should be our top priority to make our communities safer,” he said.

A spokesman for Gov. Mike DeWine said the office would not be issuing any statement Tuesday evening.

The vote shows a yawning gap between the will of the voters and that of lawmakers. Bills to expand abortion access or create a recreational marijuana program in Ohio have been introduced over the years. They've failed to develop any real traction.

Tom Haren, a spokesman for the campaign backing recreational marijuana said voters spoke and lawmakers should respect that.

"This was a landslide victory, and I can't believe that in 2023 we're actually talking about elected officials not respecting the will of the voters," he said. "And not respecting the outcome of an election."