



From the Office of Secretary of State John A. Gale

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Signatures for wage initiative turned in to Sec. of State's office

LINCOLN – Nebraska voters may get a chance in November to vote on whether the state's minimum wage should be increased. Organizers of a petition initiative say they turned in 134,899 signatures to the Secretary of State's office, in hopes of putting the measure on the ballot. If enough signatures are verified, this would be the first petition initiative to be put to voters since 2008.

"To qualify a statutory measure for the ballot, circulators must collect signatures from at least 7 percent of registered voters," explained Secretary of State John Gale. "Those signatures must include at least 5 percent of registered voters from 38 of the state's 93 counties."

Gale said that exact number would not be known until Monday, July 7 after election officials from all 93 counties verified their voter registration numbers to the Secretary of State's office.

Also on that date, petitions will be numbered, date stamped and sorted. Then they will be mailed or delivered to the appropriate county election officials for verification.

"They'll be checking to make sure each petition signer is properly registered, and that the address, signature and birthdates match up. County election officials will have 40 days from the date they receive the petitions to get through that process.

My office can grant an additional 10 days if needed, but since this is the only petition initiative it's likely they'll get the job done in time."

Gale said that his office would be able to follow the progress of each county as to how many signatures were accepted or rejected. "Once we've heard from all 93 counties we'll notify the petition organizer."

While the petitions are processed, the state Attorney General's office will start drafting the language that will appear on the ballot in November.

Should the petition have enough signatures, that language is also published in a brochure that is produced and distributed by the Secretary of State's office. "It's sent to county election officials, who are required to provide copies of the pamphlet in three locations. One location is usually the library. In addition, our office will publish it online."

Within eight weeks of the election the Secretary of State's office will also coordinate a series of public hearings, one in each congressional district, so that voters have a chance to learn about the initiative and weigh in.

"Then three weeks before the election, we publish a notice in the legal newspapers, spelling out the initiative as it will appear on the ballot," Gale added.

The last petition initiative to appear on a statewide ballot was in 2008 dealing with affirmative action. "Since 1994, there have been a variety of initiatives that have been decided by Nebraska voters including gambling, the defense of marriage act, term limits and budget limitations to name a few," said Gale.

"It's not uncommon to have an average of six to eight petition initiatives filed each election cycle. Obviously, many never get off the ground. It's really dependent on the organizers to ensure that the issue goes the distance and is put before voters."

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