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## Walker recall effort kicks off

*Organizers seeking 600,000 to 700,000 signatures*

By JASON STEIN and PATRICK MARLEY

Taking the next step in a battle that's been in the works since February, organizers planned a midnight kickoff to efforts to gather more than a half million recall petitions against GOP Gov. Scott Walker and Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch.

"There are some midnight collection events around the state. People are ready to go and want to start as soon as possible. There's a lot of excitement about it," said Meagan Mahaffey, executive director of United Wisconsin.

United Wisconsin, which is helping lead the recall efforts against Walker, planned a midnight electronic filing and a paper filing later Tuesday morning with state elections officials, Mahaffey said. Separate recall efforts against GOP senators also will be launched Tuesday. Meanwhile, Walker hit back with an ad campaign starting with Monday night's Green Bay Packers game.

The recall attempt against Walker formally begins a fight that has been looming since the governor introduced a bill in February to repeal most collective bargaining for most public employees. If successful, it would be only the third recall election for a governor to be held in the nation's history.

Dozens of petition drive events are planned around the state for Tuesday, including one at Walker's home in Wauwatosa, and a large rally is planned for Madison at the state Capitol on Saturday. United Wisconsin's website crashed around 2 p.m. Monday because of a cyber attack, the group said.

Organizers have to gather 540,208 valid signatures within 60 days — by Jan. 14 — to force a recall election against Walker and must turn them in by Jan. 17. Mahaffey said her group hopes to gather 600,000 to 700,000 signatures to allow a cushion if some signatures are later found not to count.

Walker said Monday that he was focused on his efforts to create jobs rather than campaigning.

"I think people are ready to move forward," he said. "I was elected to serve as governor, so I'm going to stay focused on that."

The governor said he would launch a fundraising effort Tuesday along with a major jobs announcement — Walker and lawmakers can take unlimited political donations to spend on certain items in a recall defense.

The Walker campaign began airing TV ads in Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison and Wausau during the Monday night football contest between the Packers and Minnesota Vikings. The campaign spot will air throughout the rest of the week in those markets. Walker's team has purchased more than \$300,000 worth of airtime between Monday and Sunday.

The ad features recently elected Waukesha School Board member Karin Sue Rajnicek praising Walker's education reforms.

"We were worried when the state budget meant there was going to be less money for our school district, and we have 25 schools," Rajnicek says in the commercial. "But Gov. Walker —

he gave us options that reduced our biggest costs so that we could put more money back into our classrooms.”

Joshua Spivak, a senior fellow at the Hugh L. Carey Institute for Government Reform at Wagner College in New York, said a successful petition drive in Wisconsin would be “definitely historic” — only North Dakota and California had held gubernatorial recall elections before. Both succeeded.

On his Recall Elections Blog, Spivak noted that Wisconsin has a more difficult bar for people seeking to gather recall signatures than many other states and the shortest time frame for gathering them.

In Ohio this month, voters repealed a similar union bargaining law after organizers gathered more than 1.3 million signatures to trigger a referendum. Melissa Fazekas, a spokeswoman for the organizing group We Are Ohio, said it took a tractor-trailer truck to deliver the signatures.

“It literally filled the entire semi right up to the door closing,” she said.

The effort in Ohio was boosted by thousands of volunteers and social media — We Are Ohio had about 100,000 fans on Facebook, Fazekas said.

Recall efforts also will be launched against three Republican senators Tuesday, Democratic Party chairman Mike Tate said. Those targeted are Pam Galloway of Wausau, Terry Moulton of Chippewa Falls and Van Wanggaard of Racine, Tate said.

Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau) said he also expects recalls to be filed Tuesday against him along with the other three GOP senators.

“I’m disappointed because I know what it’s going to do to this chamber — it’s going to throw it back in political mode,” he said.

Fitzgerald said he did not think he would launch recalls against Democratic senators right away, saying Republicans could wait to see how successful Democrats were in gathering signatures. But he added that local GOP activists could launch recalls on their own. Sen. Kathleen Vinehout of Alma would be Republicans’ top recall target, he said.

Tate said that more than 9,000 people have been trained for the recalls. He said he believed Democrats could take back control of the state Senate, which Republicans hold by a 17-16 majority after Democrats won two seats in an earlier round of recalls last summer.

“We only need one, and I like our odds,” Tate said.

If elections are scheduled against Republicans, Fitzgerald said, his party might again run fake Democrats as protest candidates to create primaries and push the general elections back by a month, calling that plan earlier this year “perhaps one of the better successes” for his party.

The Senate recall elections cost state and local governments at least \$2.1 million. The spate of fake Democrats running as protest candidates and forcing primaries cost \$400,000, according to estimates local clerks provided the Journal Sentinel this summer.

Republicans have set up an online “recall integrity center” to help build evidence of fraud. If Democrats submit enough signatures to recall the governor, Walker will have a brief period to try to prevent a recall by challenging some of the signatures.

The site allows Walker backers to submit photos, videos and complaints to the Republican Party. The material will be reviewed by retired police officers and FBI agents, said Stephan Thompson, the party’s executive director.

For their part, Democrats have raised concerns that some Republicans may gather signatures for a Walker recall, tell people not to sign other petitions, and then destroy the

signatures they gather. Some people posting online comments have said they intend to do just that, though it is impossible to know if they intend to follow through on those threats.

Fraudulently defacing or destroying election petitions is a felony, said Reid Magney, a spokesman for the Government Accountability Board, which runs state elections.

If a recall election is forced, it's still unclear who would be the candidate for the Democrats. Possible candidates include former U.S. Rep. Dave Obey of Wausau, Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, U.S. Rep. Ron Kind of La Crosse, state Sen. Jon Erpenbach of Middleton and former Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk.

Once the signatures are filed, the accountability board under state law would have 31 days — until Feb. 17 — to review the petitions. If the board found enough valid signatures had been filed, it would call for an election on March 27. That election would become a primary if more than two members of any party ran, creating a general recall election on April 24.

However, those election dates could easily be thrown off. If the accountability board wasn't able to analyze all the signatures within 31 days, it could ask a Dane County circuit judge for more time. It received about an extra month to review recall petitions this year against state senators. The board's director, Kevin Kennedy, has said his agency would probably need 60 days to analyze the petitions.

Legal challenges could add further delays.

*Daniel Bice of the Journal Sentinel staff contributed to this report.*