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## Psychedelics Decriminalization Initiatives Submitted for 2022 Colorado Ballot

CONOR MCCORMICK-CAVANAGH | DECEMBER 17, 2021 | 9:00AM



There's debate in the mushroom community over how to approach decriminalization in Colorado. **Conor McCormick-Cavanagh**



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The 2022 Colorado ballot will likely include a measure to decriminalize psychedelics – and perhaps more than one, as local grassroots advocates scramble to match proposals just filed by a national group.

"It's really important to advocate for full decrim first and foremost," Nicole Foerster said at a December 16 virtual meeting of the group she leads, **Decriminalize Nature Boulder County**. "If we wait too long to decriminalize or to create equitable access frameworks for psilocybin, then we allow these FDA models to take more control, and they'll be able to spend more money against groups like us [who want] to decriminalize and create equity and community-driven policies."

Decriminalize Nature Boulder County, whose membership overlaps with the group that pushed the successful 2019 campaign that made Denver the first city to decriminalize psychedelic mushrooms, held the meeting as a way to rally advocates to take action. But a Washington, D.C.-based political action committee could beat them to the ballot box.

On December 3, the [New Approach PAC](#), which has supported various marijuana legalization efforts across the country and was involved in the recent Oregon vote to create legal, regulated access to psilocybin, submitted language for two decriminalization initiatives to the [Colorado Secretary of State's Office](#).

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One of the New Approach initiatives seeks to decriminalize ibogaine, DMT, mescaline (excluding peyote), psilocybin and psilocin for those 21 and older; the implementation of the decriminalization of these substances would be controlled by a Natural Medicine Advisory Board, with members appointed by the governor. Under this initiative, the state would also license healers and healing centers that could supply these substances and assist people in using them. It would cap the allowable amount of the active psychoactive substance at four grams.

The second initiative focuses solely on decriminalizing psilocybin and psilocin, the active ingredients in psychedelic mushrooms, which are commonly referred to as psilocybin mushrooms. Under this proposal, the decriminalization would be implemented by the [Department of Regulatory Agencies](#); otherwise, the process would follow many of the protocols outlined in the first initiative, although just for mushrooms.

If either of these initiatives is approved by the Colorado Secretary of State's Office, proponents would need to gather signatures statewide in order to land a measure on the 2022 ballot.

"Our goal is to make the healing benefits of these natural medicines available to people they can help, including veterans with PTSD, survivors of domestic or sexual abuse, people with treatment-resistant depression, and others for whom our typical mental-health treatments just aren't working," says Ben Unger, New Approach PAC's psychedelic program director.

But during the December 16 meeting, Foerster expressed concerns over the language in the two New Approach initiatives. "They're looking to create these top-down, restrictive policies in places where grassroots community has been the strongest and where policy has been passed by grassroots community," Foerster said. The inclusion of limits on the amount of a substance that a person could possess particularly worried her; California advocates recently [clashed with New Approach](#) on that issue.

But another local activist has no concerns about New Approach; in fact, he's now lobbying on that group's behalf in Colorado. "We're glad to have New Approach as a partner who can help us bring this level of change to the entire state, because we're going to create more opportunities for so many people to receive the help they need to deal with mental health conditions that are otherwise devastating," says [Kevin Matthews](#), the leader of the successful Decriminalize Denver campaign. "Creating new opportunities for people to heal is what drives us, and we look forward to engaging with Colorado residents on this issue."

During the meeting, Foerster made it clear that while she and other advocates

were not consulted regarding New Approach's work in Colorado, her group will attempt to engage with the PAC now. "We are trying to push and influence them to only include psilocybin and psilocin, because they said they're unwilling to do anything that's not going to set up a regulatory framework," she said.

That focus on a regulated model is designed to help as many people as possible in a safe manner, according to Unger. "We believe more people will be served and treated by making psychedelics available in a safe, regulated and consistent way," he says. "These natural medicines can be life-changing for so many, and we want people to be confident that the treatment they're receiving is high-quality and held to clear standards of accountability."

Some attending the virtual meeting expressed concerns that New Approach's fast pace regarding decriminalization initiatives in Colorado might leave some grassroots activists behind.

But Matthews thinks the pace is appropriate. "We've been discussing the possibility of statewide reform since this spring, and I'm proud of what we've accomplished so far to ensure this initiative will be ready on the timeline necessary to set it up for success," he says. "We still have more outreach and collaboration to do in the coming weeks, and it's been exciting working alongside so many of my colleagues and friends from our successful effort in Denver in 2019."

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**CONOR MCCORMICK-CAVANAGH** is a staff writer at *Westword*, where he covers a range of beats, including local politics, immigration and homelessness. He previously worked as a journalist in Tunisia and loves to talk New York sports.

**CONTACT:** [Conor McCormick-Cavanagh](#)

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# Denver's Glowing Reputation as "Christmas Capital of the World"

PATRICIA CALHOUN | DECEMBER 24, 2021 | 6:52AM

The City and County Building in 2019, a brighter year. **Downtown Denver**



On Christmas Eve 1914, ten-year-old David Jonathan Sturgeon was in bed at his home at 4408 West 34th Avenue in Denver, too sick to go downstairs and join his family around the Christmas tree. **David Dwight "D.D." Sturgeon**, a pioneering Denver electrician, decided to cheer up his son, so he dipped lightbulbs in red and green paint, connected them to electrical wire, and hung them in a pine tree outside David's window, brightening his holiday and inspiring people from miles away to come marvel at the sight of the illuminated tree.

Although there had been a few earlier outdoor decorating attempts around the country, they dimmed compared to the glowing reports provided by **Denver Post** reporter **Pinky Wayne**, and enthusiastic city boosters of a century ago were soon touting this as the first illuminated outdoor Christmas tree. The next year, Sturgeon neighbors decorated their trees, too, and the tradition lived on. (Sadly, young David did not; he succumbed to a different illness.)

Denver was soon in the spotlight of a national craze. D.D. Sturgeon was dubbed the "Father of Yule Lighting." Wayne organized the country's first outdoor-lighting contest in Denver in 1918, attracting hundreds of contestants. Wayne's efforts inspired manufacturers to come up with affordable products that would work indoors and outdoors regardless of the weather, local historian Rosemary Fetter reports, and as a result, electric billboards across the country began to flash with colored globes, giving rise to flashing neon signs.

By 1919, the official city electrician, John Malpiede, had caught the fever and replaced the lights in Denver Civic Center with colored globes of red and green for the holidays. The next year, he put an illuminated Christmas tree in front of the State Capitol. After that, he kept scavaging for items – and buildings – to add to his holiday display. In 1926, Mayor Ben Stapleton gave him the okay and \$400 to illuminate the front of City Hall, and by the late 1920s, Denver had become known as the "Christmas Capital of the World." In 1945, NBC broadcast a tribute to Denver and the Sturgeon family for having created a beautiful holiday tradition.

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By the time Malpiede retired in 1956, Denver's fancy new City and County Building was more than twenty years old, and his holiday lighting project had grown to an annual extravaganza, with seventeen miles of electrical wiring and 25,000 bulbs. The display spilled down the steps of the neoclassical municipal building, landing at a Nativity scene – but taking several creative detours along the way. As a result, the holiday show had gotten so garish and tasteless that after Quigg Newton took over as mayor in 1947, he brought in an artist to redesign it, creating a huge uproar in the process. "He discovered that Denverites like things that are garish and tasteless," historian Tom Noel pointed out in 2014 (when the [original version of this column](#) was published).

Denverites aren't the only ones, of course: Holiday decorating is a multimillion-dollar business, but even as people add the latest marvels – flashing icicles! blow-up snowmen! – they remain tied to their traditions. New Denver mayor John Hickenlooper learned that in 2004, when he suggested replacing the "Merry Christmas" sign at the top of the City and County Building with the more inclusive "Happy Holidays" – which made sense not just because Denver is home to more than Christians, but also because the lighting display glows from the day after Thanksgiving through Christmas and into late January, as a cheerful if over-the-top welcome for visitors to the National Western Stock Show.

But Hickenlooper was quickly persuaded to leave the sign alone. "Over the past several days, it has become clear to me that there is strong community sentiment to maintain the 'Merry Christmas' sign, and I am glad to oblige," he said at the time. "My intention was never to disrespect or slight anyone or any religious tradition. I apologize to anyone who may have been offended or mistakenly felt I was being anti-Christmas. 'Hickenlooper' might have two Os, but I am not Scrooge. We are happy to keep the 'Merry Christmas' sign."

There have been other changes over the years, though. During the cash-strapped '80s, the budget-busted city was going to dispense with the display, until the Keep the Lights Foundation came through with enough cash to leave the lights on. (Sturgeon Electric Company, the business that D.D. Sturgeon founded in 1912, has never been in the holiday-lighting business itself, but it contributed to that campaign; today it's a large industrial-construction company responsible for a lot of the power lines across the country. Although it's now a subsidiary of a holding company, it continues to be based in Colorado, in Henderson.)

The Denver City and County Building display is now safely back in the city budget, and a few years ago, all of those bulbs were replaced with LED lights that are not only more energy-efficient (they use only a third of the energy of previous years), but allow for the colors to be changed with the flick of a switch – creating those recent celebrations of pink, purple, red and, of course, orange-and-blue causes.

But it's what's below the lights – the Nativity scene on the steps – that has always created the most controversy. In order to keep church and state separate, over the years Denver has had to make a few modifications to the display.

the years Denver has added a number of non-religious figures to the display, including giant nutcrackers, reindeer, candy canes and Santa's workshop. But even so, in 1981, four individuals – who described themselves as "tax-paying non-Christians" – filed a complaint in Denver District Court alleging that the Nativity scene erected on city property and funded through tax revenues was a violation of their rights. They asked that Denver not only be prohibited from displaying the scene, but forced to sell it at public auction. The case went to trial in 1982, when aptly named historian Noel talked about "virgin birth" and then-mayor William McNichols testified that he'd received "thousands" of letters concerning the display, which generated a feeling of goodwill "that is rarely matched during the rest of the year."

Ultimately, the court determined that Denver's Nativity scene did not violate article II, section 4 of the Colorado Constitution – the so-called Preference Clause, which states that no preference shall be "given by law to any religious denomination or mode of worship" – and four years later, in September 1986, the Colorado Supreme Court concurred. "Considered in the context of the larger display," the judges ruled, the Denver Nativity scene "does not violate the Preference Clause of the Colorado Constitution."

In the four decades since that ruling, the Colorado Supreme Court's position has only been strengthened by U.S. Supreme Court decisions – and the addition of even more junk to the display has helped, too. Consider it the Santa Clause: While it may insult aesthetics, it keeps Colorado constitutional. To combat the filching of the Baby Jesus – by radio pranksters, not cranky atheists – the Nativity scene is now covered in glass, like a square snow globe. At some pivotal point now lost to history, Santa's workshop was replaced with a workshop full of country-music elves; the nutcrackers surrendered to old age. But angels on high still oversee the action.

Let there be light.

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**PATRICIA CALHOUN** co-founded *Westword* in 1977; she's been the editor ever since. She's a regular on the weekly CPT12 roundtable *Colorado Inside Out*, played a real journalist in John Sayles's *Silver City*, once interviewed President Bill Clinton while wearing flip-flops, and has been honored with numerous national awards for her columns and feature-writing.

**CONTACT:** [Patricia Calhoun](#)

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# Watch Out for Extra Energy Costs This Winter

CATIE CHESHIRE | DECEMBER 23, 2021 | 7:36AM

Xcel customers should expect to pay more for heat this winter. [American Public Power Association](#)



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Colorado's [Xcel customers](#) could see their monthly natural gas bills rise by \$27 over last winter's charges, even if they use the same amount of energy.

That's because natural gas prices are trending up, explains Matt Lindstrom, an Xcel media relations representative. According to the [U.S. Energy Information Administration](#), in September 2020 the price of natural gas for residential customers in Colorado was \$10.34 per thousand cubic feet. In September 2021, the price was \$15.48. While September is the most recent month for which data is available, the price had been increasing every month this year.

In November, Xcel started informing customers about a potential increase to their bills. Lindstrom notes that Colorado Xcel customers still pay under the national average for their natural gas. The U.S. Energy Information Administration lists the [average cost](#) in the United States in September as \$20.22 per thousand cubic feet.

Natural gas production hasn't rebounded from the pandemic, Lindstrom notes. That, coupled with a higher demand for natural gas, is what accounts for the price increase. Xcel doesn't make any more profit if the price of natural gas is higher, he says, adding that the company tries to limit the impact that natural gas price fluctuations have on customers, but can't completely insulate customers from those changes.

“With cold weather arriving in Colorado, we’re doing a number of things to prepare and minimize the impacts of increased natural gas prices on our company so we can help keep bills low for our customers,” Lindstrom says. Those efforts include filling storage accounts, contracting for gas in advance of use and putting extra inventory in fuel oil tanks to back up power generation. The company also purchased financial hedges to attempt to address some of the price increases.

Xcel offers customers [several tips](#) that can help keep energy bills lower even as prices change. Among them: Ensure that ceiling fans turn in a clockwise direction, because that helps push warm air down from the ceiling; opening drapes and blinds to maximize heat from sunlight; and operate appliances that use a lot of energy, such as space heaters, dishwashers and washing machines and dryers, during early morning and late evening hours.

If customers have trouble paying their bills, Lindstrom encourages them to contact the company. Xcel offers payment plans and energy assistance in some circumstances; find information on the [Xcel website](#) or call 1-800-895-4999.

Colorado also offers the [Low-income Energy Assistance Program](#), known as LEAP, that helps with winter heating costs. Anyone who makes under 60 percent of the state's median income level could be eligible; that level is currently set at \$2,759 per month or lower for a household of one to \$7,322 per month or lower for a household of seven, though the website notes that those benchmarks change each year.

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**CATIE CHESHIRE** is *Westword's* editorial fellow. After getting her undergraduate degree at Regis University, she went to Arizona State University for a master's degree. She missed everything about Denver -- from the less-intense sun to the food, the scenery and even the bus system. Now she's reunited with Denver and writing news for *Westword*.

**CONTACT:** [Catie Cheshire](#)

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