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## Recall effort against Wis. governor races against deadline

By BEN JONES

APPLETON, Wis. — They have fanned out across Wisconsin, going door to door, setting up card tables on frozen lawns and standing post in busy parking lots.

Their mission is summed up by one word, scrawled across a plywood sign a small band of volunteers dragged to the side of a highway one recent day to get the attention of passing drivers: “RECALL.”

Hundreds of people statewide are involved in a movement to recall Wisconsin’s first-term Republican Gov. Scott Walker, who drew a firestorm of protests last spring after he unveiled and enacted rules that curtailed the ability of state public workers and teachers to collectively bargain.

“Petitions are rolling in by the thousands every day,” said Meagan Mahaffey, executive director of United Wisconsin, a political action committee leading the effort to recall Walker and Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch.

“Wisconsin is paying attention and is very divided over the topic of whether Gov. Walker should stay or go,” said Arnold Shober, an assistant professor of government at Lawrence University in Appleton.

The recall effort formally launched Nov. 15. Signature gatherers are closing in on the 540,208 voters they need to force Walker back on the ballot, according to Mahaffey. That number represents a quarter of the votes cast when Walker was elected in 2010. To help stave off signature challenges, organizers are aiming for 722,077 signatures, Mahaffey said. The deadline for filing signatures is Jan. 17.

Joshua Spivak, a senior fellow at the Hugh L. Carey Center for Government Reform at Wagner College in New York, said recalls are historically rare. If the effort is successful, Walker would be the third U.S. governor to be recalled. North Dakota voters recalled Lynn Frazier in 1921, and California voters booted Gray Davis in 2003.

Spivak, who runs the Recall Elections Blog, said recall efforts are becoming more common.

Before last year, 21 lawmakers had been the subject of recall elections in state history, he said. In 2011, 11 state lawmakers faced recalls, including nine state senators. Two Republican senators lost their seats, although the party retained control of that house.

Ben Sparks, a spokesman for the Republican Party of Wisconsin, calls the recall effort “a power grab on the part of liberal interests and the Wisconsin Democrats.”

“Voters elected Gov. Walker with an overwhelming majority,” he said. “Now they are simply trying to take advantage of the state’s lax recall laws and are making a grab at the Governor’s Mansion.”

A half-dozen volunteers recently manned a station near the northeast Wisconsin city of Appleton. They included a retired teacher, a retired school principal, an unemployed man and a man who works in the financial sector, and they set up shop in a parking lot near a bank and strip mall. Cars pulled in and out, and in a little over an hour, the group had gathered about 50 signatures.

“I’m out here because I no longer recognize the state that I grew up in,” said Ann Muenster, a retired teacher. “He (Walker) ran on creating 250,000 jobs. We’ve had seven or eight months of job losses. The worst thing is he has pitted private workers against public workers.”

While business was steady at the drive-through location, reaction was not. Some drivers honked, and one hollered “boo, boo, boo.”

Elsewhere in the state, recall signs have been vandalized and stolen. Two men were arrested in southwestern Wisconsin for spitting on recall volunteers.

Allegations of misconduct have not been limited to recall opponents. One man told a Milwaukee television reporter he signed a recall petition 80 times.

The state Republican Party launched an online “Recall Integrity Center” to document and investigate any cases of fraud, intimidation or other tactics.

“This entire process has been overrun with misconduct and fraud,” Sparks said.

Walker, formerly Milwaukee County executive, defeated Democrat Tom Barrett in November 2010 with 52% of the vote.

A poll conducted by Wisconsin Public Radio and St. Norbert College in November found 58% of Wisconsin residents support recalling the governor.

Mike Tate, chairman of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin, said a recall election could take place in May or June but the timing will depend on a number of unknown factors, including what challenges there might be to signatures or whether there is a Democratic primary. No Democrats have formally declared a run for the seat.

In the meantime, signature drives and the divide over Walker continue.

“I don’t agree with anything he’s done so far,” said Laura Van Domelen, after she pulled over to sign a volunteer’s clipboard. “What he did with the unions and the teachers was deplorable.”

A few miles from the petition drive, Dan Miller, a salesman, said he likes his governor, and he predicts the recall effort will fail.

“He’s not afraid to make enemies, which I like,” Miller said. “He’s marching on with what he believes in.”

*Jones reports for The Post-Crescent in Appleton, Wisc. [He is Madison bureau chief.]*