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NEWS RELEASE

FROM: Washington Coalition for Open Government

TOPIC: Eleven Initiative Petitions Available for Public Inspection at State Archives

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In a breakthrough for open government in Washington, citizens now can easily inspect signature petitions gathered by initiative king Tim Eyman and other initiative sponsors. All it takes is a visit to the State Archives in Olympia.

Thanks to a request by the Washington Coalition for Open Government -- a government watchdog group -- Secretary of State Sam Reed has placed copies of signed petitions for eleven initiatives at the archives for free public inspection. Nine of the initiatives were sponsored by Eyman.

Reed's action means citizens do not have to pay to see who signed the petitions. Otherwise, citizens or groups would have had to pay \$1,554 for copies of microfilms and DVDs containing the petitions that Eyman had fought to keep secret.

Reed sent copies of the microfilms and DVDs to the archives after the coalition pointed out to Reed that state law requires records to be made available for public inspection at no cost.

WCOG president Toby Nixon said the coalition hopes the Secretary of State's office will follow the same practice for all future initiatives and referendums.

The coalition, a non-partisan, non-profit group dedicated to protecting the public's right to access public records and meetings, submitted a request to the Secretary of State in October, 2009, to inspect the initiative petitions. The same petitions had previously been requested by another party, and Tim Eyman had sued the Secretary of State to block their release. WCOG requested access to the petitions to give it standing to intervene in that lawsuit and insure that the public's interest was protected. The Eyman lawsuit was put on hold pending resolution of the Referendum 71 petition case in the U.S. Supreme Court, in which WCOG had also intervened to protect the public interest.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8-1 on June 24 that, as a general matter, release of petitions does not violate the constitutional rights of the signers of the petitions. Following a hearing on September 3, Thurston County Superior Court Judge Richard Hicks lifted the temporary restraining order on release of the eleven initiatives which were blocked from release by the Eyman lawsuit. (The Referendum 71 petitions are still not available for inspection, while the second part of that case continues in federal court.)

WCOG was notified on September 7 that it could purchase copies of the microfilms and DVDs of the eleven initiative petitions from the Secretary of State for \$1554.81. WCOG reminded the Secretary of State that state law requires records to be available for public inspection at no cost. In response to WCOG's request, the Secretary of State made copies of the original microfilms and DVDs; it is those copies that are now available for free public inspection at the State Archives.

The initiatives now available for public inspection are I-722, I-745, I-747, I-776, I-900, I-912, I-917, I-920, I-960, I-985, and I-1033. All were sponsored by Eyman except for I-912 and I-920.

The State Archives are located at 1129 Washington St SE in Olympia; their hours are 8:30AM to 4:30PM Monday through Friday. Appointments to view the petitions are available by calling 360-586-1492; interested members of the public may drop by any time the Archives are open, but may have to wait if the copies are being viewed by others. Copies of any or all of the petitions are also available for purchase.

For more information, contact the Washington Coalition for Open Government, 6351 Seaview Ave NW, Seattle, WA 98107-2664, phone 206-782-0393 or by email at info@washingtoncog.org.

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