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## State verifies signatures for recall; Morse files protest

By MEGAN SCHRADER

Enough signatures were verified Tuesday to make Senate President John Morse the first state-level elected official to face a recall election, but Morse isn't going to ballot without a fight.

The secretary of state's office verified that 10,137 registered voters in Senate District 11 — west and central Colorado Springs — signed a petition to recall Morse through a election.

Only 7,178 signatures are necessary to take the issue to voters in coming months.

But a voter in Morse's district challenged the petition a few hours after the signatures were verified Tuesday, saying it did not include all the language required under law.

Catherine Kleinsmith filed the protest because the circulated petition didn't specifically demand the election of a successor for Morse. Her protest says the omission of that language invalidates every signature submitted to the state.

"It's just so ironic that these interests, seeking to force an election that most District 11 voters don't want, would skip over key portions of the Colorado Constitution," said Christy LeLait, executive director of the El Paso County Democratic Party, who is also managing Morse's campaign to stay in office.

If the issue does go to ballot voters will first be asked whether Morse should be kicked out of office and, if so, who should replace him. Alternative candidates can get their names on the ballot to contest the incumbent.

Morse was targeted for recall by a group called El Paso Freedom Defense Fund over his support of several gun laws and his leadership style which they said stifled public debate on the legislation.

"We were expecting the most frivolous legal challenges to this and we're prepared to fight this," said a new spokesperson for the group Jessica Kerns, of Denver who opposed the gun legislation at the Capitol this spring. "We're prepared to defend every single petition so that the peoples' voices can be heard."

Three other democrats faced recall petition drives but only Sen. Angela Giron, D-Pueblo, had signatures turned in to be verified by the state. An announcement is expected in coming weeks whether 11,500 of the 13,500 signatures turned in are valid registered voters in Giron's district.

In the Morse recall drive 16,198 signatures were turned in and of those 6,061 were rejected for a variety of issues including signers not living in the district or not being a registered voter.

Kleinsmith's appeal will be ruled upon by Colorado Secretary of State Scott Gessler. His ruling could be appealed in court and should the Democrats be unsuccessful, Morse still is entitled to a 15-day period to challenge the signatures for other reasons.

If challenges to the signatures are unsuccessful a recall election likely would be held in August.

These would be the first state-level elected officials to face a recall vote in Colorado, according to Joshua Spivak, a professor at Wagner College in New York who tracks and studies recall efforts.

If no protests to the recall are successful, the governor will set a date for the election during a 30 day window that begins roughly two months after Tuesday.

According to the El Paso County Clerk and Recorder's Election Office it will cost the county roughly \$152,000 to hold a stand-alone election for the recall.