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Walker recall effort kicks off

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Organizers seeking 600,000 to 700,000 signatures

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By Jason Stein and Patrick Marley of the Journal Sentinel

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Madison - 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 Rajniecek 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," Rajniecek 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.

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