

Comcast deems pro-pot ad just one toké over the line

■ Robert Edward Forchion Jr. says he's running for Congress, but he's having trouble spreading his pro-marijuana message.

By **BRIAN J. O'MALLEY**
For The Press

CAMDEN — Robert Edward Forchion Jr. says he's fighting for the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech.

Others think the Browns Mills man just likes to smoke pot.

In either case, Forchion said he is running for the 3rd District seat in Congress representing parts of Ocean, Burlington

and Atlantic counties this fall, and he's spending a lot of time in court trying to spread his message challenging the country's drug policy.

Forchion, 39, filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court here Feb. 16 in an effort to force media giant Comcast to air his pro-marijuana message.

The latest trouble started after Comcast Field Marketing Manger Allen Murphy



FORCHION

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rejected Forchion's political commercial in a Feb. 12 letter stating that he wasn't a legally qualified candidate for office because he's not registered with the New Jersey State Election Division.

Forchion contends he is a legitimate write-in candidate who is not required to register.

The 3rd District seat in Congress is currently held by Republican James Saxton.

Forchion said he would have registered, but he's awaiting the March 26 outcome of another case in civil court in which he is seeking to have his name legally changed to NJWEEDMAN.COM.

In that case, Forchion said, prosecutors have argued that the name can be used to enhance a market position for selling the drug, which Forchion claims he hasn't done since 1997.

It's not the first time the marijuana advocate has found himself in legal trouble for promoting the illegal use of marijuana.

After serving 17 months on a conviction for conspiracy to distribute a controlled dangerous substance in excess of 20 pounds, Forchion was released on bail in April 2002.

Two months later he submitted public-service announcements opposing marijuana laws to Comcast for broadcast. That prompted his arrest for violating parole.

U.S. District Court Judge Joseph E. Irenas ordered Forchion's release five months later in an opinion stating: "The First Amendment exists so as to promote debate on issues of public importance. ... The advocacy of the legalization of marijuana is a legitimate political position in this country."

Forchion said his current trouble stems from religious fundamentalists who find his message provocative. He said the issue has little to do with drug use.

"I call myself a First Amendment activist," he says. "Everyone else calls me a marijuana activist."

Forchion also maintains that the erosion of free speech is a slippery slope for all Americans.

"If you don't have the right to free speech, you don't have the right to anything else," he said.

If his name change bid is successful later this month, Forchion says he will collect the 100 signatures required to be officially placed on the ballot.