

Utility reform has 36,000 signatures Energy petition drives now underway

By CATHERINE SIEGNER
Of the Emerald

The right of Oregonians to the initiative and referendum process is being fully exercised this summer. Three petitions dealing with energy are now being circulated state-wide, with varying degrees of success.

A constitutional amendment that would ban nuclear power plants and the transportation or storage of nuclear waste in the state of Oregon (except for existing test reactors) is being pushed by Lloyd Marbet and his organization, Forelaws on Board. This petition is nowhere near the target

for signatures, due to a heavy work load and a late start.

Marbet has been in Arlington, Oregon recently for the Pebble Springs hearings, and has not had time to work out an effective campaign for the petition.

"We get requests for petitions daily, but I don't really know how many signatures we've got. Nobody has had time to put it together and figure it out," he says. "There's been a problem with fractionalism, or groups disagreeing on what projects to tackle, and that's been a disappointment. But I feel the time is now for this measure, and I'm still hopeful."

Petitions are available from

Forelaws on Board, 19142 S. Bakers Ferry Rd., Boring, Oregon, 97009, or call 637-3549.

Oregonians for Utility Reform (O.U.R.) is a Salem group started by Rep. Bob Vian, D-Salem, to sponsor a measure that would prohibit private, investor-owned utilities in Oregon from charging customers for the cost of constructing new generation facilities.

The group's petition would remove Construction Work in Progress (CWIP) charges from the rate base. A similar measure was passed in Missouri in 1976 by a 63 percent to 37 percent margin, even though its proponents were outspent by the utilities 40 to one.

O.U.R. has already collected 36,000 signatures, and needs 55,000 to place the measure before the voters in November.

"I think we have an excellent chance of stopping these unfair charges," says David McTeague, O.U.R. coordinator. "But we still need help to make sure the measure gets on the ballot."

For petitions or more information, contact Oregonians for Utility Reform, P.O. Box 12763, Salem, Oregon, 97309, or call 378-8639 or 362-2374.

The third petition has had the most success. It would amend existing law to shorten the process for forming public utility districts

(PUDs). The PUD petition has been supported by the Oregon State Grange, the Oregon-Washington Farmers' Union, the Consumer Power League, and other public power groups around the state.

Proponents of the petition argue that Oregon's utility rates are higher than Washington's because Oregon didn't take advantage of easier PUD laws in the 1930s and establish more PUDs. They say customers served by private, investor-owned utilities such as Portland General Electric Co. or Pacific Power & Light Co. pay as much as twice as the customers of either the Clark County PUD in Vancouver, Wash., or the Eugene Water & Electric Board in Lane County, Oregon.

Currently, groups wishing to form a PUD must circulate two petitions and pass two bond measures in order to establish the boundaries, set up a board of directors, and purchase existing generation and distribution facilities.

The proposed measure would shorten the procedure to one petition and one bond measure. The circulators of the petition have collected approximately 40,000 signatures state-wide, and need 15,000 more.

W.C. Harris, master of the Oregon State Grange, says he is sure the measure will get on the ballot. "The only way to get low-cost power from the Bonneville Power Administration is to have more public utility districts. This amendment would make them easier to form," he says.

Those interested in helping with the PUD petition should contact the Oregon State Grange in Portland at 236-1118, or the People for Public Power office in Eugene at 485-5145.

The three petitions with the necessary signatures must be filed with the Secretary of State by July 1, 1978.

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