

Anti-abortion petition drive gaining steam

By KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

A group of "ordinary citizens" has gathered nearly 37,000 signatures and needs about 9,000 more before a measure opposing state-financed abortions can be put to a statewide vote in November.

According to Chris Kowitz, a member of Oregonians Opposed to State Financed Abortions, a group which disagrees with the state Emergency Board's decision to allocate nearly \$1 million for abortion and have now begun the long petition drive to the state's general election Nov. 7.

That petition, filed with the Secretary of State's office in April, would place a measure on the November ballot to end all state funds used for abortions for poor women. It would also make it illegal for state employees to give a woman seeking an abortion advice about which agency to contact.

That proposal and one other petition also filed in April, narrowly escaped cancellation earlier this month when the state Supreme Court heard a challenge

Would put state funding to vote

to the measures' wording.

The titles for the measures, written by the state Attorney General's office, were challenged by the state American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) because of their ambiguity.

The challenge failed June 6, when the court handed down a ruling that the Attorney General's descriptions of the proposals weren't as vague as the ACLU suggested.

Both sets of petitioners have until July 7 to gather more than 46,000 valid signatures from registered voters to be placed on the November ballot. Kowitz's group may have set a petition-signature record last weekend by gathering 36,486 valid signatures in just two days.

The other ballot proposal, filed by three Jackson County residents, would not only eliminate abortion in Oregon,

but it would also put an end to "violating the human life form."

That measure, Kowitz says, may be "clouding" the issue about abortion in the state. While his group's petition just calls for an end to state spending for abortions, the other petition would place an amendment on the Oregon constitution prohibiting apparently all forms of killing, including euthanasia, capital punishment and abortion.

According to the petition filed with the secretary of state's office, the second measure's one sentence description says that "each human form is possessed with a life right that cannot be violated in any form."

Kowitz and the Oregonians Opposed to State Funded Abortions don't see the abortion issue as a moral matter.

"This isn't a moral issue," he says. "It

isn't a religious issue. At this point this is just a fiscal issue."

Kowitz and eight other people formed the organization several months ago after the state Emergency Board voted to fund abortions for poor women. The group, he says, has been unjustly labeled a Right-To-Life organization, which isn't true.

"We're just a group of ordinary citizens who got together over a cup of coffee to talk about some of our concerns," Kowitz says. "We're not affiliated with the Right-To-Life people and we only have one Catholic member. We just don't think that this is a proper function of our state government."

The group may also enlist the aid of people who could be considered pro-abortion but may not want their tax dollars to go for abortions, Kowitz says.

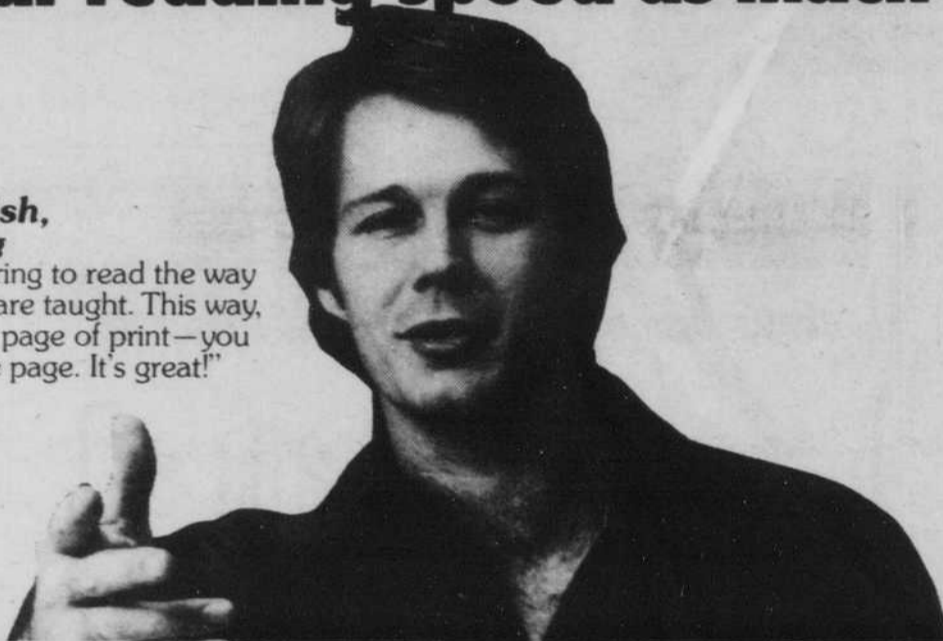
So far, he says, the group has volunteers working in nearly 20 cities around the state. Most of those are more concerned with the state money to be spent than they are the abortion issue, he says.

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