

Mabon: hippie to conservative

WILSONVILLE
(AP) — He returned from his tour of duty in Vietnam with a daily marijuana habit and no sense of purpose to his life.

"When I got back, I let my hair grow long, and I stayed in the drug culture. I took heavier drugs like mescaline and LSD. I was a hippie with a promiscuous lifestyle."

Then, Lon Mabon began living with a group of "Jesus Freaks" at a commune in Eureka, Calif., and his life changed forever.

"That's where I met the Lord," he said. "I turned around unbelievably."

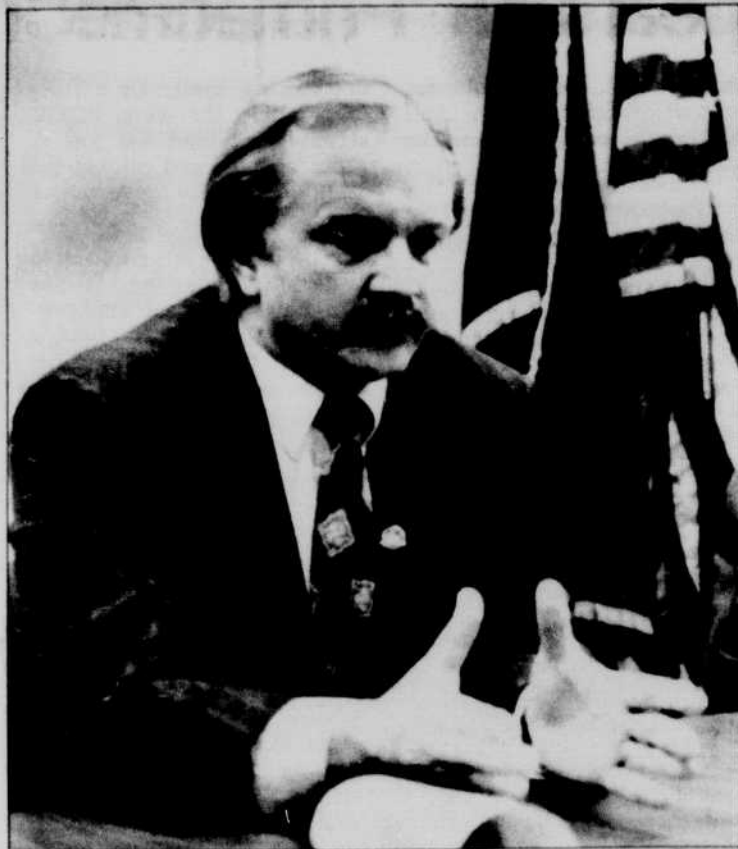
Mabon's conversion back in 1969 put him on a path that led him to become one of Oregon's most controversial figures — the author of Measure 9, the anti-gay rights proposal on the Nov. 3 ballot.

While portraying himself as a defender of traditional family values that are under attack by "militant homosexuals," Mabon said his experience with drug addiction taught him important lessons about tolerance and compassion.

"We've got former homosexuals in the Oregon Citizens Alliance. We're not looking down at anyone," the OCA chairman said during an interview at his office in this suburb south of Portland.

His critics say, however, that Mabon has almost single-handedly unleashed the most virulent, anti-homosexual movement Oregon has ever seen.

"For him to say he's non-judgmental is a cruel hoax," said Peggy Norman, manager of the No on 9 campaign. "He's harsh and unforgiving and lacking in any tolerance for people who are different from himself."



Lon Mabon, head of the OCA and a prominent leader behind Measure 9, insists that the upcoming ballot measure is not a personal attack on homosexuals.

Another opponent, Oregon Republican Chairman Craig Berkman, calls Mabon a "huckster" who's using the gay rights issue to raise money for himself and his family. Mabon says that's simply not true.

Whatever the case, Mabon, 45, has gained more notoriety than almost any single figure in Oregon politics in recent memory.

On a recent day, Mabon fielded calls from reporters for the *London Times* and the British Broadcasting Corp. Earlier in the day, a camera crew from the *MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour* interviewed Mabon about

Measure 9. "We knew it would get attention, but never in our wildest dreams did we think it would get this much attention," Mabon said.

Mabon said he first became politically involved in 1980, the year his political hero, Ronald Reagan, was first elected president.

"That's when I started to have a little hope that the people of America wanted traditional values," he said.

At the time, Mabon and his wife, Bonnie, owned and oper-

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