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## Small towns divided by measure



SCAPPOOSE (AP) — Until recently, homosexuality simply was not an issue that Crystal Coffey discussed much.

In this little timber town on the Columbia River, people generally keep to themselves about what they do in their bedrooms. "I thought we were pretty much 'live and let live' out here," said Coffey, who runs the Country Cloth fabric shop.

Live and let live? Not these days in Oregon. Whether they like it or not — and many do not — Oregonians have been shoved to the forefront of the national debate between gay rights activists and their fundamentalist Christian opponents.

A precedent-setting initiative called Ballot Measure 9 on Oregon's Nov. 3 ballot would amend the state constitution to declare homosexuality "abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse" and ensure that homosexuals could not be considered a minority eligible for protection under anti-discrimination laws.

"This is very, very terrifying," said Suzanne Pharr, a spokeswoman for the Portland-based No on 9 campaign. "This is the first time in history that a constitution would be amended to take away rights rather than to extend rights."

Measure 9 supporters see it differently.

"Here is a clear line in the sand," said Lon Mabon, head of the Oregon Citizens Alliance, the initiative's sponsor. "Family values, a traditional understanding of right and wrong — these things are decaying. Measure 9 is an attempt to erect an outer limit."

"Either we are going to view homosexuality as

a clean, normal thing that we'll teach our children, or we'll view it as we have for 200 years — as something we want our children to avoid."

Measures to limit gay rights also are being considered in Colorado, Portland, Maine, and Tampa, Fla.

But Oregon's initiative goes the furthest. State and local governments would be forbidden from doing anything to "promote, encourage or facilitate homosexuality, pedophilia, sadism or masochism." Public schools would be required to "assist in setting a standard" in recognizing homosexuality as abnormal.

Such strong language is part of a growing conservative backlash to gay rights victories nationwide.

California Gov. Pete Wilson signed a bill Sept. 25 making California the seventh state to outlaw job discrimination against homosexuals. On Sept. 30, County commissioners in Salt Lake City banned discrimination based on sexual orientation in hiring county workers or providing government services.

Then there's Oregon. Supporters say Measure 9 is intended only to prevent homosexuals from gaining special rights. But opponents predict that openly gay teachers would be fired, books mentioning homosexuality banned from public libraries, and AIDS prevention programs hobbled.

"We believe the anti-gay campaign in Oregon is a test case for homophobic initiatives around the country," said Robert Bray, spokesman for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

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