

# Gay-rights lawsuit argued before judge

SALEM (AP) — Backers of anti-gay rights initiative measures urged a Marion County judge on Monday to overturn a new law that prohibits local ordinances on gay rights issues.

Judge Albin Norblad of Marion County Circuit Court heard arguments in a challenge brought by members of the Oregon Citizens Alliance against the law passed by the 1993 Legislature.

The law forbids cities and counties from "enacting or enforcing" ordinances that give special privileges or single out people or groups based on sexual orientation.

The OCA argues the law infringes on citizens' rights under the Oregon Constitution to initiate laws.

"When people voted for the measures, they expected to pass a law," said Salem attorney Melanie Mansell, representing OCA Chairman Lon Mabon and some other OCA members.

"It's as if the Legislature has decided that the issue of sexual orientation is one they cannot handle," she said.

The state contends the Legislature has authority to prevent cities and counties from adopting their own laws on a subject.

"The Legislature is entitled to make a policy choice that (local governments) cannot pass laws in derogation of rights of gays and lesbians," said Eric Bloch, an assistant attorney general.

Voters have passed OCA-sponsored measures in 10 cities and five counties, but the new law has created uncertainty over their legal status.

Some local officials have refused to enforce the ordinances because of the law. Several more local elections on similar measures are scheduled this spring.

The OCA, meanwhile, is collecting petition signatures in an effort to put a statewide anti-gay rights measure on the ballot in

November. The proposal is a revised version of one defeated by voters in 1992.

Mansell said upholding the law likely would invalidate pro-gay rights city ordinances now on the books in Portland, Corvallis and Ashland, because they single out homosexuals for certain treatment.

It is considered certain the dispute will end up in the state's appellate courts no matter what.

Another circuit judge, L.A. Merryman of Jackson County, has ruled the law is unconstitutionally broad. In doing that he upheld an anti-gay rights initiative passed by Medford voters.

The law passed late in the 1993 legislative session was a compromise.

The measure was put together after a House committee would not support a Senate-passed bill to spell out several civil rights protections for homosexuals.

# Gun lobbyist, ATF square off in federal court

TACOMA (AP) — A four-year legal battle between a high-profile Washington state gun lobbyist and the federal agency that regulates firearms comes to a head in federal court here this week.

Allen Woodbridge, a lobbyist for the Washington State Rifle and Pistol Association and vice-president of the Washington Arms Collectors club, goes on trial on 12 counts of possession of machine guns and machine gun parts.

Attorneys for Woodbridge, owner of Big Al's Guns near Sumner, claim he was set up and that the search of his business was illegal. Woodbridge has appealed for the support of other gun owners.

"Believe me, if these charges stand and I am convicted, no owner of any semiautomatic firearm will be safe from prosecution for possessing a 'machine gun,'" Woodbridge wrote in a recent issue of Gun-News.

The case started in 1989, when U.S. Customs agents at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport intercepted a packaged addressed to Big Al's from Commonwealth Militaria in Ontario, Canada.

An agent from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms determined the package contained parts from an illegal Belgium-made gun.

ATF agents and Pierce County sheriff's deputies arranged for the package to be delivered to Woodbridge's house next to the gun shop. They followed with a search warrant.

"Once inside, we discovered weapons of all types literally strewn around the house," says a sheriff's office report.

An ATF agent said he found an AR-15 rifle that appeared to be illegally modified to fire automatically — more than one shot per trigger pull.

Officers got a second search warrant, enlarging their authority to search the house and nearby gun shop. They confiscated several assault rifles, military-style devices and other weapons and parts, according to a sheriff's inventory.

The Pierce County prosecutor charged Woodbridge with seven counts of possession of machine guns or machine gun parts.

Before the trial started, two confiscated weapons were lost — one of them an AR-15 allegedly modified to fire automatically — from the county sheriff's office property room.

Woodbridge was tried on the state charges in

1991, but the case was dismissed because a prosecutor forgot to ask a witness to identify him in court.

Woodbridge then sued the lead ATF agent and Pierce County. He claimed that ATF unlawfully took his property and that he was deprived of his rights to be free from unlawful searches and to own weapons.

The suit was dismissed in federal court, in part, because the ATF agent was never properly served with the document. The case is on appeal to the federal appeals court in San Francisco.

In September, a grand jury indicted Woodbridge on 12 counts of federal weapons violations — the same general allegations he faced years ago in Pierce County.

Woodbridge's attorneys claim the package contained legal parts, and that the search of his home was improper.

In a hearing Friday, U.S. District Judge Robert J. Bryan denied a defense motion to suppress evidence, saying the law officers seemed justified in seeking a search warrant.

ATF officials and one of Woodbridge's attorneys, Richard F. Dejean of Sumner, refused to comment on the case, citing the pending charges. Woodbridge also declined requests for comment.

In an earlier interview, Woodbridge said the National Rifle Association agreed to cover up to two-thirds of his legal bill.

Various other pro-gun groups have agreed to help pay legal expenses, said Paul Williams, executive director of the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms, a lobby group.

Williams said the groups were grateful "for all the work he's done for firearms groups in the state. I think people are inclined to pay him back when he needs it."

Woodbridge has a reputation as a moderate voice within the gun lobby.

Last week, he testified before the House Judiciary Committee about proposed gun legislation, assuring lawmakers that gun owners would not oppose efforts to keep handguns away from juveniles.

Last year, Woodbridge's endorsement was a key to passage of legislation allowing police to destroy seized handguns, lawmakers said.

# Volunteers help police

PASCO, Wash. (AP) — Police here are enlisting the aid of senior citizens to help fight crime.

Betty and Bud Smith, both in their 60s, are volunteers for the Citizens Patrol Group. The pilot program got under way last year to combat rising crime and gang violence.

"This is not a new concept," Police Chief Don Francis said. "Hopefully, it will catch on and we can put an end to some of this crime."

Instead of easing into retirement, the Smiths are spending nights armed with a flashlight and a cellular phone. They patrol their neighborhood on the lookout for crime.

"I like it," Betty Smith said. "You can get an idea of what's going on in your community and neighbors really help each other out."

The Smiths decided to volunteer their services because they were tired of complaining about crime without doing anything about it. They graduated last month from a 16-hour training course that police require the volunteers to take.

The police department is seeking more volunteers and hopes to begin a new round of training sessions next month.

So far, one call placed by a citizen volunteer has resulted in an arrest. A motorist was seen driving recklessly through a neighborhood, and was arrested for driving while intoxicated, the chief said.

The Smiths are captains of their neighborhood block watch and usually patrol the streets from their car in the hours before midnight.

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