

Anti-gay initiatives fail to make ballot in eight states



(AP) — Groups hoping to pass anti-homosexual initiatives in 10 states this year have fallen short of their goals, gathering enough signatures to get measures on ballots in only two states.

Several days of reckoning came last week in what has become a battle between gays and the conservatives who are backing initiatives to deny what they call "special rights" for homosexuals.

Supporters of such measures failed to file signed petitions in Missouri and Washington state on Friday, but did submit enough signatures to qualify for the ballots in Idaho and Oregon.

More than 250,000 petition signatures were due Monday in Michigan, the last of the 10 states where ballot language has been filed. But George Matousek of the Michigan Family Values Committee, which started the petition drive, said Monday the effort had been put on hold because the wording was identical to a Colorado law that was declared unconstitutional by that state's Supreme Court.

"There's no point in our circulating an identical petition and then have it ruled unconstitutional," said Matousek, who

added that the group will suspend its efforts until a ruling is issued on an appeal in the Colorado case.

David Smith of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force expressed relief that few of the measures had garnered enough support.

"We started out in January with 10 of these initiatives and we're down to a handful," said Smith, whose group has been campaigning against them. But he also said he expected efforts on other fronts.

Arthur Kropp, president of People for the American Way, a liberal group, noted that similar measures are showing up in state legislatures and before town councils and library boards.

"We're not going to see any lessening of attacks on gays and lesbians because it works," he said. "We're seeing it from almost every right-wing group in almost every letter."

Tom Minnery, a spokesman for Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian group that assisted initiative supporters in Washington state, said he thought the ballot measures had shown a successful grass-roots movement.

"I think they will continue," he said. "I think they represent a strong feeling that people support constitutional rights but

not special rights."

Organizers in Missouri failed to submit the required 121,000 signatures Friday.

"Petitions were pouring in but time just ran out," said Paul Summers, head of The Amendment Coalition in Missouri, said Friday. "Be assured we are not going away. We intend to stay on the battle front."

The Oregon Citizens Alliance, led by Lon Mabon, submitted 120,000 signatures Friday, about 30,000 more than needed to get its measure on the ballot.

Suzanne Goldberg, a lawyer with the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, said her group would fight the ballot measures, first by challenging petition signatures.

Lambda is leading the gay community's fight against Colorado's Measure 2, a 1992 amendment that banned the state and local governments from prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Last December, the Colorado Supreme Court found Amendment 2 unconstitutional. The state is appealing.

On July 6, a day before petition signatures were due in Idaho, the Idaho Citizens Alliance submitted 38,510 verified signatures of registered voters, more than 6,000 more than required to put the initiative on the ballot in November. An addi-

tional 17,000 signatures were not certified.

"The nation is going in the wrong direction," said alliance founder Kelly Walton. "I've just decided to set a standard on the other side — 'No, it's not for Idaho.'"

Frank Meliti, leader of the Traditional Values Coalition of Arizona, held a news conference last Thursday to say he had collected enough signatures to get the measure on the ballot there. But he said the group had decided against a ballot campaign because even if the measure were passed, it would be tied up for years in courts because of lawsuits by opponents.

In Nevada, a ballot initiative fizzled when organizers there failed to file the necessary 51,339 valid signatures by the June 21 deadline.

In Florida, the state Supreme Court effectively kept a proposed initiative off the ballot, ruling in March that the language in a proposed measure would confuse voters.

Proponents of a ballot initiative in Maine failed to gain enough signatures to make this year's ballot. They have promised to try again next year.

And in Ohio, the Pro Family Forum gave up its plan for a ballot initiative in favor of targeting individual politicians who are gay or sympathetic to gay causes.

Valdez spill didn't lower fish prices, Exxon says

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — The 1989 oil spill from the Exxon Valdez isn't to blame for today's lower fish prices, company lawyers told a jury Monday before the panel began considering damages in a lawsuit filed by commercial fishermen.

Fishermen contend the spill has caused lasting harm to their livelihoods by depleting fish stocks and that they are entitled to roughly \$900 million in damages. Exxon Corp. maintains coastal waters have long since recovered from the spill's effects.

The 12-member federal jury must wade through a complex form, first determining if they unanimously agree the 11 million gallon spill was a cause of fishermen's losses. If so, they must determine damages for each fisherman.

The same panel last month convicted Exxon and skipper Joseph Hazelwood, who has acknowledged seeking help for alcohol abuse, of recklessly causing the tanker grounding in 1989.

Jurors will consider damage to once-lucrative herring and salmon harvests in Prince William Sound, as well as a decline in price and quantity of salmon in Kodiak and Cook Inlet. Losses also are separated out based on what type of fishing gear used.

Exxon lawyers repeatedly have said the company was prepared to offer fair compensation in the trial's second phase, which began June 20 and dealt only with claims filed by roughly 10,000 fishermen. A state trial dealing with land damages allegedly caused by the spill also is under way.

"Exxon has belied up to the bar," company lawyer Bert Cooper told the federal jury Monday. But as for claims that a "taint" lingers over Alaska seafood, causing depressed fish prices today, Cooper said, "Tain't so."

"We draw the line. We don't think it's fair to blame Exxon for that," he said.

He reviewed expert testimony that said, in part, that Alaska salmon are known to survive in some streams where there is oil from naturally occurring seeps. Cooper also claimed that Prince William Sound fisheries, traditionally among the most productive in Alaska, were destined for a crash because the system could not continue to support huge populations.

Jurors have spent the past three weeks hearing technical testimony dealing with herring and salmon life cycles, the crash in value of state commercial fishing licenses and a decline in fish prices on the Tokyo wholesale market, where the bulk of Alaska seafood is sold.

Georgians flee rising flood waters

BAINBRIDGE, Ga. (AP) — The curtains were drawn in empty homes Monday and residents abandoned the streets to police patrols as the Flint River flowed out of its banks, edging ominously into this southwest Georgia town.

More than a third of Bainbridge's 10,000 residents fled the advancing flood waters, which claimed at least 28 lives in Georgia. The flooding wasn't expected to peak at Bainbridge until Thursday, when forecasters predict the river will crest at a record 20 feet above flood stage.

Upriver in the Albany area, 50 miles northeast of Bainbridge, the Flint finally began to recede early Monday and some of the 30,000 people in the area who fled last week returned to their waterlogged homes.

Thunderstorms crossed north Georgia Monday night, bringing a flash flood warning from Carroll County on the Alabama line to Rockdale County southwest of Atlanta. Spot flooding was reported around the Atlanta area.

And just off the Florida Panhandle, oyster harvests were suspended Monday in one of the nation's major beds because of floodwater-borne bacteria pouring into Apalachicola Bay.

In Bainbridge, state troopers patrolled neighborhoods and military police set up barricades near the river, hoping to prevent more deaths from the flooding spawned by Tropical Storm Alberto a week ago.

"No one passes. If you do, you're liable to get a knot in your head. They're not playing around," Assistant Fire Chief Dennis Mock said.

South of town, National Guard troops helped build a 10-foot earthen dike to shield a fertilizer plant with 9 million pounds of ammonia, which reacts violently with water and can be poisonous if inhaled.

Assistant Fire Chief Doyle Welch said the chem-

ical was a concern, but company officials believed the precautions were enough to prevent a catastrophe at the 200-foot-tall ammonia tank. When the river crests, water at the plant is expected to be 5 feet deep, he said.

"We can't be 100 percent certain because nobody has ever encountered this before," said David Prichard, a spokesman for Vigoro Industries, which owns the plant.

Some 150 National Guard troops from the 550th Engineer Battalion labored in muddy boots and green camouflage uniforms to build earthen dams and sandbag dikes. At nightfall, they planned to work as security officers.

Sgt. Robert Rambeau, 43, of Bainbridge, who normally works at a feed mill, said he didn't mind the hard work or the fact that such duty pays Guardsmen only about half of what they make for week-end drills.

"I'm helping the community and saving my hometown and helping the city avoid a disaster," he said. "We're hurt a little by losing money, but we'll still be able to smile awhile because we're helping out."

Seven miles north of Albany, Patti Milton pointed to marks showing the flood had reached the ceiling of her home in Lee County.

"My house is on a concrete slab, and I've got a good roof. It's what's in between we'll have to replace," she said. Like most other flood victims, she has no flood insurance.

Preliminary damage estimates had not been made. Crop damage could reach \$100 million, officials said. About 175,000 people remained without drinking water.

Disaster aid centers opened Monday in Albany, Americus, Jonesboro and Macon to help flood victims apply for government grants and loans.

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