

Effort to ban same-sex marriage criticized by gay-rights group

Opponents say petition's signature-gathering procedures were disobeyed

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ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PORTLAND, Ore. — Supporters of a gay marriage ban pressured people into signing petitions and failed to witness voters' signatures, according to complaints filed Monday by a Portland-based gay rights group.

Basic Rights Oregon says it has been monitoring the petition drive by the Defense of Marriage Coalition for weeks, watching for violations of election law.

But a spokesman for the Portland-based Coalition said volunteers have been careful to follow the rules, calling the complaints "insulting and inflammatory."

The filing comes three days before the group must turn in at least 100,840 valid signatures to qualify for the November ballot. The proposed measure would amend Oregon's constitution to

legally define marriage as between a man and a woman.

"With an issue of this magnitude, which has such a profound impact of a specific group of Oregonians, we expect every petition to be circulated within the law," said Roey Thorpe, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon.

Thorpe said the complaints filed Monday stemmed from reports from Basic Rights Oregon supporters sprinkled throughout the state.

According to the complaints, volunteers at churches in Lowell and Beaver Creek told food pantry patrons that they needed to sign a petition banning gay marriage if they were registered voters.

Basic Rights Oregon also alleges that signature collectors passed petition sheets along church pews or left them unattended in church lobbies without witnessing the voters' signatures in person. And the group says volunteers in Tualatin circulated a petition on May 1 — more than a week before they could officially begin collecting signatures.

State elections official Fred Neal confirmed that the complaints have been filed, but said they would be treated as confidential.

Tim Nashif, political director for the Defense of Marriage Coalition, dismissed Basic Rights Oregon's claims as "part of their campaign strategy."

"Where is this widespread abuse?" he asked. "We're going to let our activities and what we've done speak for itself."

Nashif said a guide to proper signature gathering is printed on every petition sheet. Volunteers for the Defense of Marriage Coalition also receive an "Important Instructions" pamphlet detailing the process, he said.

Neal, the elections official, said the state would respond to any criminal complaints with prosecution. Those would include failing to personally witness a voter signing a petition sheet.

Civil complaints, such as circulating a petition sheet too early, would cause the signatures to be declared invalid, he said.

REACTION

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for the June 30 deadline.

Jarrett White, senior political science major and chairman of the College Republicans, agreed, but said the turnover could spur further violence.

"Terrorists could try and screw this up to make the U.S. look bad," said White. "We are going to stay the course, but it will be tough."

Psychology graduate student Casey Campbell said he doesn't think the power turnover will do anything to curb the violence in Iraq because the United States is still seen as a foreign occupying force.

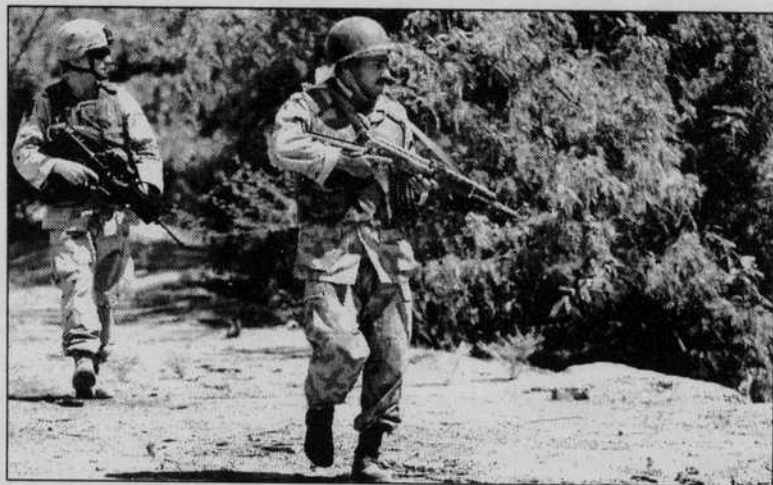
Cramer said the power turnover isn't very meaningful because the United States is not really turning over any power; U.S. officials will be making all of the main decisions, while Iraqi officials will only announce U.S. policy, she added.

Political science professor Richard Kraus agreed and said the focus on Iraqi sovereignty is misplaced because of the continued U.S. occupation.

White said the continued U.S. presence in Iraq is important to avoid another dictatorship taking the place of Saddam Hussein's regime, forcing the United States to intervene again 10 years from now.

"Were not going to cut and run," White said.

Cramer said that turning over power now is too soon, that without democratic elections, there would be no legitimate authority to receive power. Cramer said the Kurdish



KRT PHOTO BY KHAMPHA BOUAPHANH/FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

An Iraqi National Guard member (right) patrols with 1st Lt. Wade Aubin in Baghdad, Iraq, on Sunday, June 27. With sovereignty being handed over to Iraqis, the same security issues still exist.

people in Iraq were pushed aside during coalition-building because the United States prefers to deal with the more powerful Shiite majority.

"We're picking winners," Cramer said.

Elections have been scheduled for Jan. 31, but Cramer is doubtful that the world will see a self-governed, democratic Iraq anytime soon.

"Stable democracies are hard to implant," Cramer said. "We'd have to stay there a long time."

White said that democracy in Iraq will take time and an extended U.S. presence because the Iraqis are not used to democracy. White cited Germany and Japan in the years following World War II as examples of countries that, after their dictatorial leaders

were defeated, became democracies with the help of the United States.

Cramer also cited post-World War II Germany and Japan and said that with foreign help there is a much better chance that democracy will flourish in Iraq. However, Cramer said the administration should be taken over by the United Nations and not the United States.

White disagreed and said that we should not have been trying to fight a politically correct war and we shouldn't now be trying to find a politically correct peace.

"We need to get the job done," said White. "We shouldn't be scared of the repercussions of world opinion."

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