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Just news

Professionals, volunteers urge "Vote No on 8"

*"Measure 8 would be bad policy, bad law,
bad government and bad business," says
Oregonians for Fairness*

BY ANNDEE HOCHMAN

The room, at first glance, is either a campaign office or a showroom for the Rand McNally map company. A huge multi-colored map of Oregon faces visitors when they walk in; charts of the state's congressional districts hang on a far wall. In the background is the light tick of a computer keyboard. Then you notice the banner that unmistakably announces the purpose of this place, the phrase that has become the mantra of the No on 8 campaign: "It's not fair. It's not right. It's a witch hunt."

This is the campaign office of Oregonians for Fairness, the headquarters of the fight to defeat this election's hottest ballot measure. From this busy room in southeast Portland come the fund-raising strategies, media tactics, brochures and discussions that define the fight against Measure 8.

In the end, it will be up to Oregon voters on November 8 to pass or pounce on Measure 8, which would repeal Gov. Neil Goldschmidt's executive order prohibiting discrimination against gays and lesbians in state hiring and services. But for a few more critical days, the task of educating Oregon about the measure rests in the hands of the people at OFF — and in the daily, time-consuming, sometimes tedious details of running a statewide campaign.

The telephone blurs into the light chatter with its high-tech, jingly ring. "Hello, Oregonians for Fairness. This is Tom; may I help you?" And another day begins in the life of the campaign.

Cathy Siemens is on the phone again — she is hardly ever off the phone these days. She is discussing the virtues of an electronic clipping service with a caller, doodling large pencil abstracts on a yellow pad and listening with one ear to Tom Norton, a full-time volunteer for OFF.

"There's a guy on the phone from Willamette University Law School," Norton says, poking his head into Siemens's office. "He wants to put on a debate down there between the 'yes' and 'no' people."

Already this morning Siemens has discussed the campaign on KXL radio with the Rev. Alan Deale, minister of First Unitarian Church. The show was a response to Paul Cameron's September 20 appearance on the same program in which he urged support for the ballot measure. Cameron, a rabid anti-homosexual activist who was dropped from the American Psychological

Association because of his extreme views, said on the program that "We have a society that is in terrible sexual trouble . . . passage of Measure 8 will help stop the continual erosion of our sexual standards in our society."

This morning, Siemens had her chance to talk back. Measure 8 would be bad policy, bad law, bad government and bad business," she told listeners. Then she returned to the office smiling, happily handing out "Honorary Lesbian" buttons to all the men on the staff.

Now she settles in her office, flips open a datebook and is — once again — on the phone, advising an organizer in Bend on how to ask for endorsements, reviewing editorials on Measure 8 from Oregon newspapers, arranging a plug for OFF during a Casselberry-Dupree concert.

Although campaign policy comes from the top — from campaign manager Liz Kaufman, from Siemens, from other staff — the endless legwork depends on a "shadow staff" of volunteers who do everything from looking up zip codes to registering voters in bars on weekend nights. Carl Goodman, whose job is to cheerfully lasso volunteers, strides grinning through the office, encouraging a woman to do some telephone fund-raising.

"The people doing it are loving it. It's really exciting to call up these heterosexual voters and actually talk to them about gay rights," he says.

In the back room, Bob Clark, a volunteer, transfers a mailing list to the computer. He got mad about Measure 8 supporters back in the summer when he'd walk through Lloyd Center and see the "No Special Rights" banners.

"I used to needle 'em a little bit. I'd take the literature and say, 'What are you telling these people?'" Computer input isn't the most high-profile campaign job, but Clark knows it is necessary. "It makes me feel like I'm doing something," he says.

A day in the OFF campaign reveals the high energy and organized spirit behind the No on 8 fight. The office shouts efficiency, with charts taped on all the walls and giant, heavily annotated calendars in each office. Endless lists ensure that the details will be taken care of — that contributors will be thanked in writing, that the new order of buttons will arrive on time, that organizers around the state will get the brochures and lawn signs they need.

Such a campaign demands more than full-time hours. At 7 pm on the day that began with the KXL radio show, Siemens is still grinning, still pitching an enthused message about defeating Measure 8 to a small crowd at the Metropolitan Community Church. She reminds them that the fight isn't over yet, that OFF still needs to raise \$40,000 a week until election day.

Siemens delivers the final words of the day as people file out: "Don't forget, on your way out, to sign up, buy a T-shirt, get a bumpersticker." People cluster around to talk to her. She is wearing two No on 8 stickers, one No on 8 button and another sticker that says, "Hello, my name is Cathy." When she finally leaves, she will head home to make a few more OFF-related calls before it gets too late. Then the calendar will jump one day closer to November 8, and the rustle of activity will start again.

"The amazing thing about this office is that it has this level of activity from 8 in the morning until 10 at night," said Thalia Zepatos, who is organizing a postcard campaign for OFF. "It's almost like gearing up for running a marathon — a total physical and emotional conditioning."

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