

OCA watch

by Inga Sorensen

Ballot title reworded

Human rights supporters are applauding the latest changes made to the title of the Oregon Citizens Alliance's statewide, anti-gay ballot initiative.

The Oregon Supreme Court has reworded the title to read: "Amends Constitution: Government cannot facilitate, must discourage homosexuality, other 'behaviors.'" The Right to Privacy Political Action Committee and American Civil Liberties Union both mounted challenges to the last ballot title put forth by the state attorney general's office. That wording said government could not "promote" homosexuality. Civil rights backers disapproved of that language, saying the title did not reflect the view that the initiative would not simply ban government "promotion" of homosexuality, but would essentially require discrimination against lesbians and gays. The proposed constitutional amendment seeks to forbid the state from using money to "encourage and facilitate" homosexuality. It also requires public schools to set a standard which deems homosexuality as "abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse."

The alliance's No Special Rights Committee must gather 89,028 valid signatures by July 3 to get the measure on the Nov. 1992 ballot.

OCA confuses the issue

Civil rights supporters are exploring possible legal avenues to counter the latest insult lodged against the lesbian and gay community by the OCA. Many were caught off balance when the OCA announced it was filing a "No on Hate" initiative designed to stiffen penalties for crimes motivated by prejudice that are committed against gays, minorities, and political activists. No on Hate is the formal name of a statewide, grassroots campaign that has been organizing against the OCA's ballot initiatives. "This is clearly a public relations ploy designed to confuse voters," says No on Hate spokesperson Sharon Hill, a lesbian activist. "The OCA has taken our name to confuse the public, but I believe they'll see through this manipulative tactic."

"We're currently looking into legally challenging the OCA's use of our campaign name. We're working with the secretary of state's office and the ACLU to see if we have any recourse."

The OCA's initiative does not simply toughen penalties for crimes committed out of prejudice. Current law requires such penalties for crimes committed against people due to their "sexual orientation." The OCA's proposal says crimes against those "engaging in abnormal and unnatural behavior," classified as "homosexuality, pedophilia, sadism and masochism," should require tougher penalties.

"People don't realize that once again the OCA has tried to deem gays as abnormal and perverse," says Hill.

Another note—if approved, the OCA's original statewide, anti-gay initiative would fully remove from state law stiffer penalties for crimes committed against gays because of their sexual orientation. It would also nullify any laws guaranteeing gays and lesbians basic human rights.

Portland Fairness Coalition

A new group known as the Portland Fairness Coalition Political Action Committee has been formed to fight the OCA's efforts to repeal

A Rabbi's view

by Rabbi Joshua Stampfer

The Oregon Citizens Alliance has launched a campaign on behalf of an initiative that it is sponsoring, which has the effect of denying full and equal rights to citizens in our state who belong to the gay and lesbian community. This is one more example of the intolerance that is all too rampant in our society which does not tolerate norms and views that are different from the position of the self-appointed guardians of morals in our society.

As a Jewish community we are especially sensitive to such blatant discrimination. The Nazis under Hitler decreed that Jews were not acceptable members of society and undertook a

program of extermination which led to the destruction of six million human lives. The Nazis also undertook an extermination program for homosexuals which subjected them to the same fate.

Let us all remember that Hitler began his program with small steps. First, civil rights were denied and then he felt free to go further and further, ultimately to Auschwitz and Treblinka. The price of freedom is constant vigilance and our immediate goal is to defeat this initiative. When anyone's rights in this land are denied, our own are in jeopardy.

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Portland's new ordinance banning discrimination based on sexual orientation.

According to Shane Hensinger, the coalition's community liaison, the group will host its formal kick-off on Jan. 21, one day after the OCA's deadline to submit signatures for a proposed local initiative it filed following the Portland City Council's unanimous Oct. 3 passage of the civil rights ordinance. The OCA's initiative would, if approved by voters, nullify the council's action. The No Special Rights Committee must gather 17,542 signatures by Jan. 20 to get the local initiative on the May 19 primary ballot.

Hensinger says steering and advisory committees are being formed, and a campaign manager will be hired. Oregon U.S. Rep. Ron Wyden has agreed to act as the advisory committee's co-chair, and the coalition hopes Gov. Barbara Roberts will join Wyden in that capacity. The steering committee includes members of Queer Nation, RATS, the No on Hate campaign, and Right to Privacy.

The coalition is seeking volunteers and financial support. Those interested in further information should contact the Portland Fairness Coalition Political Action Committee, c/o Right to Privacy, 921 SW Morrison #518, Portland, OR 97205.

OCA is collecting signatures

Members of the OCA's No Special Rights Committee are out in full force collecting signatures in their effort to repeal Portland's anti-discrimination ordinance. They've been making the rounds at area shopping malls, including Mall 205, where they've set up a booth on the premises. Ed Geller, an attorney representing the mall, says a 1989 Oregon Supreme Court ruling allows public petitioning in shopping malls as long as it does not cause disruption.

The OCA is said to be doing brisk business, though mall management has reportedly received numerous phone calls protesting the OCA's presence there.

Meanwhile, members of No on Hate, a

grassroots anti-OCA campaign, have organized their own Mall 205 demonstrations. They've been picketing outside the establishment and have been urging shoppers not to sign the OCA's petitions.

The OCA has also threatened a statewide boycott of Fred Meyer stores after the food chain sought and received a court order prohibiting the group from collecting signatures on its property.

Fred Meyer management received an estimated 500 calls from people angered that the No Special Rights Committee was petitioning at the entrances of its stores throughout Portland.

According to Cheryl Perrin, vice president of public affairs for Fred Meyer, the company had initially been under a Multnomah County Circuit Court order to allow such petitioning, but felt it was at a "competitive disadvantage" if the OCA continued its signature collecting.

"People were calling to say they would no longer shop here if the OCA remained on our property," she says, adding the company went back to Circuit Court and received a temporary restraining order prohibiting OCA petitioning through Jan. 3. "We'll then go into federal court and try to get an order that will prohibit such activity permanently."

Civil rights enforcement

Portland's new anti-discrimination ordinance is still without an enforcement mechanism. While the measure took effect Nov. 3, city officials have had no means to enforce it. They had hoped to have a contract with the state's Bureau of Labor and Industries, which enforces Oregon's civil rights laws, intact by Jan. 1.

Keeton Lowery, aide to City Commissioner Mike Lindberg, says the city is now looking to have the contract completed by Feb. 1. "The City Council has to set up a funding source to pay the state to enforce the ordinance, and Labor Commissioner Mary Wendy Roberts has to receive the necessary approval to accept the money. All that should be taking place in January," he says, adding his office has received three complaints from people who say they have been discriminated

against in employment because of their sexual orientation.

"All I could tell them was that until we have an enforcement mechanism in place, there's nothing we can do," says Lowery. "They can either wait until we do, because the applicability of the ordinance still dates back to Nov. 3, when the ordinance took effect. Or they can handle the matter privately now, but that means they'd have to pay for it themselves."

Salvation Army under fire

The Portland chapter of the Salvation Army was bombarded with phone calls protesting its alleged support of the OCA's anti-gay ballot initiatives. The Salvation Army received so many calls that it issued a press statement denying the charge.

"Our organization takes no position on this issue," says Salvation Army spokesperson Alice White. "The Salvation Army has absolutely no involvement with the OCA. I don't know where people got that idea."

According to Commissioner Mike Lindberg's office, the Salvation Army sent a letter to Portland City Council members denouncing homosexuality prior to its passage of the anti-discrimination ordinance. Lindberg aide Keeton Lowery says the Salvation Army sent a letter to city officials saying the organization was "disturbed about certain elements of the legislation which deal with sexual orientation...our experience and conviction is that those who expound and wish to promote deviant sexual behavior...is contrary to the basic elements which contribute in a constructive way to a wholesome society and to the Judeo-Christian belief system we expound."

Attached to the correspondence were two Salvation Army position statements, published in 1984 and 1985, concerning homosexuality. This is a sampling:

"Homosexual behavior, both male and female, promoted and accepted as an alternative lifestyle...presents a serious threat to the integrity, and solidarity of society as a whole."

"Homosexual practices unrenounced render a person unacceptable as a Salvation Army soldier..."

The letter, dated August 22, 1991, is signed by Mervyn L. Morelock, divisional commander for The Salvation Army's Cascade Division.

"That letter would have come from this office, and I can tell you we would not have sent it," says White. "I've never even seen it."

OCA video on TV

The OCA's anti-gay video aired several times last month on Multnomah Community Television, Channel 21.

Rose Read, manager of the non-profit television station's public access department, says anyone is allowed to produce and air programs at the station as long as the programming is non-commercial.

"I had previously heard about the video and knew it was controversial," says Read, "that's why I contacted people in the gay community to come on in and produce some counter-programming, which they did."

Read says members of the American Friends Service Committee, a pro-gay and lesbian rights Quaker organization, produced a video titled "Our Lives," which features members of Portland's religious community speaking publicly and positively about lesbians and gays.

"We rarely see such one-sided videos," says Read, describing the OCA's video. "We felt it was important to present a diversity of opinion, and we're pleased the gay community responded to our request."

In support of human dignity

At the request of the Hispanic community, the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs adopted unanimously this response to an initiative petition introduced by the Oregon Citizens Alliance.

WHEREAS: The mission statement of the Commission on Hispanic Affairs directs the commission to work for economic, social, legal and political equality for Oregon's Hispanic community, and

WHEREAS: The commission ought to be a leader in Oregon in helping to create a climate in which all persons may live free of fear and vio-

lence in accordance with our mission, and

WHEREAS: Discrimination and hatred does exist in Oregon with frequent and repeated attacks against lesbian and gay people and others, Therefore

Be it Resolved: The Commission on Hispanic Affairs denounces and opposes all actions, including initiative petitions or ballot measures which contradict the mission of the commission and which foster and encourage divisiveness, hatred and fear and increase the potential for violence toward members of the gay and lesbian community.