

ELECTION '94

And now, the bad news

The OCA loses in Gresham, but scores victories elsewhere in Oregon

by Martha Allen

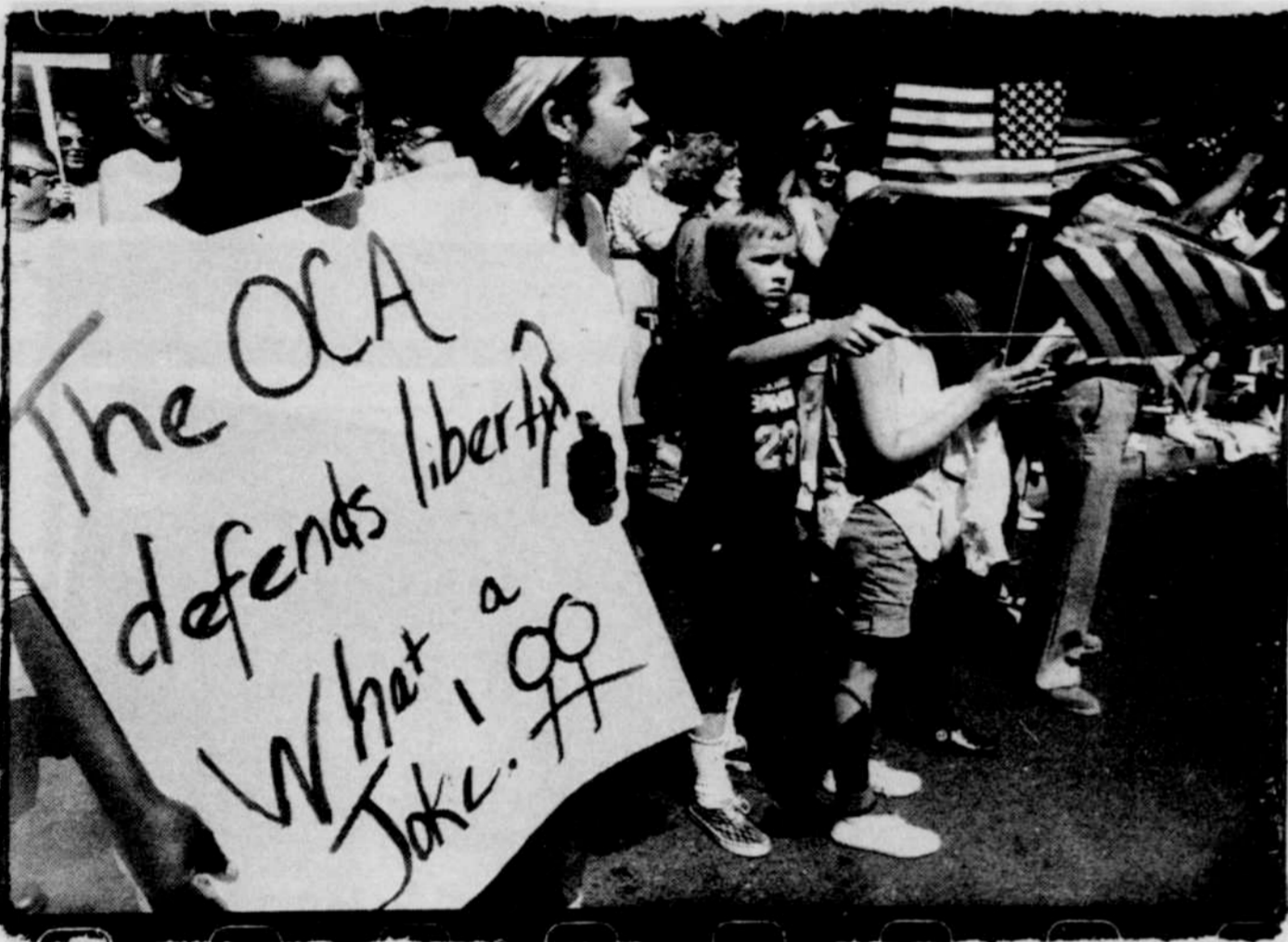


PHOTO BY CATHERINE STALFFER

Voters in Gresham narrowly defeated, due to a technicality, the latest effort by the Oregon Citizens Alliance to legislate discrimination against gay men and lesbians, but the anti-gay group scored victories in four other Oregon communities in the Tuesday, May 17, election.

In Gresham, with all but the absentee ballots counted, the OCA's measure had received 7,188 yes votes to 7,108 no votes. But according to the city's charter, the measure needed a 60 percent voter approval to pass.

Gresham voters defeated Measure 9 in 1992, and Tuesday's effort marked the first time OCA members had tried to get one of their local initiatives passed in a city where Measure 9 was voted down.

Gresham Mayor Gussie McRobert said, Thursday, May 19, it was too early to celebrate the results of the Gresham vote.

"That's premature, until we get the absentee ballots counted," McRobert said. "We know that it did not pass in Gresham, because they didn't get the 60 percent. But I would like to see them not even get 50 plus one."

The mayor said she did not know how many absentee ballots remained to be counted Thursday. The Multnomah County Elections Division said about 7,000 total absentee ballots were returned, but it was undetermined by press time how many of those were sent in by Gresham residents.

McRobert described the OCA's effort in Gresham as a "stealth campaign," noting that the people who gathered signatures for the initiative were brought in from Salem and Wilsonville, and that only one of the city's 66 churches had contributed money to the anti-gay-rights campaign fund.

"They had absolutely no support or contributions from locals," McRobert said. "They held no rallies, nothing. They relied on mailings and phone banks—nobody ever came forward."

Elsewhere in Oregon, four local OCA initiatives were approved. In Roseburg, an anti-gay-rights measure drew 2,410 yes votes to 1,317 no votes. In Oakridge, a local measure drew 362 yes votes to 344 no votes. In Cottage Grove, 1,083 people voted yes, while 813 voted no. And in Veneta, a local measure drew 301 yes votes to 243 no votes.

Since 1992, when its statewide measure was defeated, the OCA has successfully pushed discriminatory measures in 23 Oregon communities. The local initiatives bar cities from enacting anti-discrimination protections for sexual minorities. They also forbid cities from spending public money in ways that serve to "promote homosexuality."

A state law that went into effect in August 1993 prohibits local discriminatory laws. And, in about half of the 23 cities where the "Son of Nine" measures have passed, city officials have vowed not to enforce them.

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