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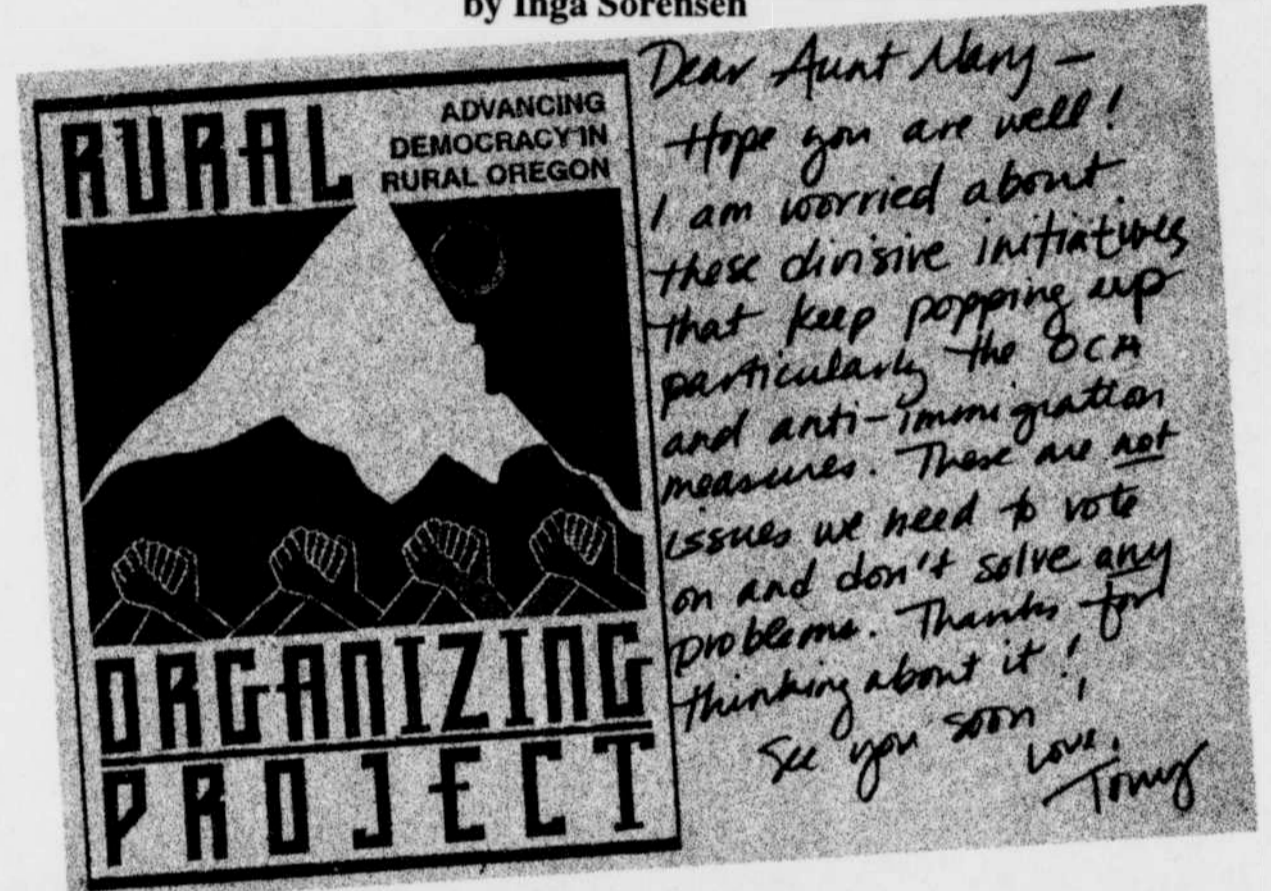
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local news

Had enough?

A "Postcards for the Masses" campaign urges voters to think before they sign ballot initiative petitions

by Inga Sorensen



People working towards a more equitable and peaceful Oregon have a new tool at their disposal: informational postcards that "gently remind potential voters [about] the basics of the petitioning process."

"The goal of these postcards is to get people to reflect upon what they sign and how that may affect their community," explains Marcy Westerling, director and founder of the Rural Organizing Project.

The project, which was formed in 1992 in response to the contentious campaign over the homophobic statewide Ballot Measure 9, has helped organize more than 60 human rights groups throughout small-town and rural Oregon. Many of those communities have also faced local anti-sexual-minority initiatives. The Oregon Citizens Alliance, sponsor of several of those measures, hopes to place two more such initiatives on the November 1996 statewide ballot.

According to Westerling, local activists gathered in June 1994 for a "Wisdom Summit," which was designed to give them an opportunity to share their experiences and ponder organizing strategies.

"People across Oregon said they were very concerned about the negative impact these divisive campaigns were having on their communities," says Westerling. "They really wanted to pull away from the negativity of it all and put an end to the name-calling and the finger-pointing."

Based on those very strong desires, local communities worked with the group to create the Enough is Enough campaign, the philosophy of which is based on the following core concepts: signing petitions is an optional activity [but voters] should think before they sign; racist, anti-abortion, anti-sexual-minority ballot measures are divisive and do not address the true causes of contemporary problems; communities work best through fairness to everyone and awareness that in our differences can be found our strengths.

The first phase of the Enough is Enough campaign, known as "Postcards for the Masses," has just gotten underway.

"There is a sense that the 1996 campaign is going to be very nasty. What we hope to do is lower the temperature and reframe the debate over these issues. Instead of saying 'bigots are bad,' we want people to step back and ask themselves, 'What do we value and care about here in our community?'" says Westerling. "We came up with the idea of these postcards and people seem incredibly enthusiastic and positive about it."

The Rural Organizing Project is mass printing standardized postcards that local groups can order and distribute in the manner they deem best. Westerling says groups could have postcard parties where they ask each guest to bring 10 addresses; get past copies of "anti-people" petitions from public archives and send a card to each signer; or ask coalition members to include the postcards in their respective newsletters. "The ideas are endless," she says.

The postcards ask people if they are

"tired of neighbor-against-neighbor ballot measures that don't solve today's problems." They call upon citizens to "decline to sign" anti-human-rights petitions and to only sign those that "you personally support and that address real problems."

"There is no loaded language in these cards. They just remind people to take a moment and think about signing a petition," says Westerling. "You can include a personal message like, 'Hey Joe, it was great seeing you at the Fourth of July barbecue. By the way...'"

She adds, "This is a very nonthreatening way for a person to reach out to a neighbor or a co-worker or a family member who may have supported an anti-gay initiative."

The cards are available in bulk with ROP member group rates at 15 cards for \$2, 100 cards for \$12 or 500 cards for \$50. Other organizations can purchase 50 cards for \$10, 100 cards \$18 or 500 cards for \$75. Cards may be purchased using a sliding scale fee as well. For more information, contact ROP at 543-3978 or write to PO Box 919, Scappoose, OR 97056.

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