

A little suspicion may not be such a bad thing, especially if you are dealing with the Oregon Citizens Alliance—says Julie Davis, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, the successor organization to the No on 13 campaign.

"The OCA likes to keep us flat-footed. They may say they're doing one thing, but you have to keep an eye on their actions to know what's really going on," she says.

Several weeks ago, rumors were circulating that the OCA was planning to drop its anti-gay initiatives that were poised for the November 1996 ballot. (This reporter received an inquiry to that effect from an *Oregonian* journalist.) However in mid-October the OCA and its chairman, Lon Mabon, announced that full-scale preparations were underway to place another statewide anti-gay-rights initiative before voters.

This particular initiative, which is similar to 1992's Ballot Measure 9 (which failed with 44 percent of the vote) and 1994's Ballot Measure 13 (which garnered 48.5 percent), would amend the state Constitution to declare that government may not "base civil rights on homosexuality, sexual behavior or desires." It would also bar, among other things, public funds from being used to "express approval of homosexuality" and would prohibit "homosexual marital status [and] spousal benefits."

Unlike past anti-gay measures, however, this initiative, dubbed Daughter of 13, states that those who are "morally opposed to certain sexual behaviors, such as homosexuality" are exercising a "right of conscience... [and that] such objection produced by one's moral standards and values is therefore not discrimination relating to civil rights."

"In essence what they are doing is writing their religious beliefs into the state Constitution," says Davis. "I think it's advantageous to us that the OCA has finally made it clear that they want to write their religious beliefs into the Constitution. There are going to be a lot of people who are going to be offended and opposed to that. It will help us."

"I think that's pretty unlikely," counters Bill Lunch, a political science professor at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

He estimates that close to 90 percent of Oregon voters have already made up their minds on this issue. He believes the remaining 10 percent could be swayed by the OCA's wording.

"Those are the people who are basically politically disengaged. They're the ones who make up their minds at the last minute. They are vulnerable



An OCA-sponsored Yes on 13 rally in Salem in 1994

OCA has full plate

The newest initiative to mandate discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is being touted as "Daughter of 13"

by Inga Sorensen

to negative campaigning and distortions," Lunch says.

"The wording change is subtle and somewhat sophisticated," he continues. "It reframes the debate. Past initiatives have been mean-spirited and ultimately cast gays as victims. That in turn has created sympathy for gay people among the broader public, which likes to support the underdog. The new wording implies that those who seek to discriminate are not only more 'moral' people but also the real victims here."

What will be more likely to sway voters, says Lunch, is the outcome of a case pending before the U.S. Supreme Court which involves Amendment 2, an initiative approved by Colorado voters in 1992.

The amendment seeks to repeal all existing laws and policies prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in Colorado and blocks the enactment of any future laws and policies in that

state which might protect people who have "homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation, conduct, practices or relationships." The Colorado Supreme Court ruled the initiative unconstitutional and the state appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

On Oct. 10 the high court heard arguments in the case, and a decision is expected sometime next summer.

"If the [U.S.] Supreme Court lets the Colorado Supreme Court's ruling stand, then I believe it will strike a major blow to the OCA," says Lunch. "Even those who may be inclined to support the OCA's initiative will choose not to out of their respect for the Constitution and the Supreme Court's interpretation of it."

Conversely, if the high court finds Amendment 2 constitutional it will lend enormous credibility and legitimacy to the OCA's efforts, which could generate a 2 percent or 3 percent increase in

votes the OCA may need to win.

The OCA has until July to collect the necessary 97,000 signatures to place its initiative on the November 1996 ballot. It has also received the green light from state officials to begin collecting signatures for three other anti-gay-rights initiatives as well. (All are similar in tone and intent.)

In addition to its anti-gay initiatives, the OCA is collecting signatures for a statewide measure that would restrict women's reproductive freedoms and is actively campaigning on behalf of Republican U.S. Senate candidate Gordon Smith, as well as ultraconservative presidential candidate Alan Keyes, who is also seeking a GOP nomination.

For her part, Davis says Basic Rights Oregon is working to build a solid, ongoing base of support. The group hopes to get as many as 200,000 Oregonians to pledge that they will oppose all anti-gay initiatives. (She says about 5,000 have made that pledge thus far.)

Davis says one of the biggest obstacles, however, is the public's misperception that it is already illegal to discriminate against someone due to his or her sexual orientation.

"People still don't realize that in most places it's perfectly legal to fire somebody just because they are gay or lesbian," she says.

To deal with this inaccurate yet widely held view, Basic Rights Oregon is creating a "Fair Workplace Project" video, which is designed to educate the public about what is and isn't legal with respect to sexual orientation discrimination (particularly as it pertains to employment issues).

The Rural Organizing Project, meanwhile, plans to launch a series of "press conversations" on Nov. 8 in at least 30 communities throughout the state. ROP, which assists human rights efforts in rural and small-town Oregon, is in the midst of its Enough is Enough campaign, whose centerpiece organizing tool is a postcard that urges Oregonians to uphold democratic principles and think twice before signing anti-human-rights petitions.

"We are trying to reframe the debate from 'the OCA is bad' to 'democracy is in jeopardy,'" explains ROP's Marcy Westerling.

She adds that ROP had initially hoped to send out 10,000 cards "but 18,000 have been sent, and we're still going strong."

Basic Rights Oregon can be reached at 222-6151; the Rural Organizing Project's number is 543-3978.



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