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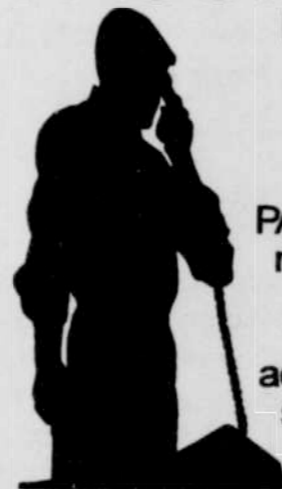
The Russell Street Clinic at Oregon Health Sciences University needs HIV participants for an oral health care research project to study the overall health effects of regular dental care for people with HIV.

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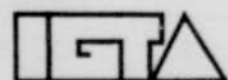
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# local news

## Still at it

*Its anti-gay initiatives derailed for now, the OCA again turns to challenging reproductive freedoms*

by Inga Sorensen

**L**on Mabon, chairman of the Oregon Citizens Alliance, seems to sense that his professional future is on the line. "On July 5, we will ascertain the health of our organization. I think we're still there," says Mabon in the June 7 issue of *The Oregonian*—one day after the OCA announced it was abandoning its 1996 anti-gay and -lesbian campaign.

For those of you who don't know, July 5 is the deadline to submit petition signatures to place initiatives on the November general election ballot. Reportedly hindered by lackluster signature gathering and frustrated by the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling against Amendment 2, the OCA decided to drop its latest statewide anti-gay-rights campaign. It is, however, continuing to collect signatures for an initiative that would severely restrict abortion rights in Oregon. Some political observers say that if the OCA is successful in qualifying the initiative for the ballot, it may remain a viable organization. If the signature drive is not successful, though, that may be the final blow to the OCA, which has suffered several setbacks during the past year.

"I am hearing some people say, 'Oh, the OCA is so weak now, they won't be able to get anything done,'" says Lisa Horowitz, executive director of the Oregon chapter of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, which works to protect women's reproductive freedoms.

"What I say is that the OCA needs to score a victory in order to survive, and they'll now be able to put all of their energy into this anti-choice campaign. This is certainly no time to sit back and relax," she says.

That sentiment is echoed by Liz Kaufman, campaign director of ProChoice Oregon, a coalition that includes a wide number of organizations concerned about health, women's issues and individual rights. Coalition members include the Oregon Medical Association; the Oregon Nurses Association; the Oregon Federation of Teachers, Education and Health Professionals; state superintendent of public instruction Norma Paulus; Portland Mayor Vera Katz; the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon; and many others.

"With the U.S. Supreme Court decision declaring Colorado's anti-gay Amendment 2 unconstitutional, the OCA sees their anti-choice measure as the key to their survival," says Kaufman. "While the OCA has suffered some reverses lately, no one should underestimate their underlying strength. With this new development, we expect them to qualify this extreme measure for the ballot."

The OCA needs to gather 97,681 valid signatures of registered voters to place its anti-abortion initiative on the Nov. 5 ballot.

The measure would ban nearly all abortions past the first trimester—12 weeks after conception—with no exceptions for the health of the mother, rape, incest, or the discovery of fatal fetal

abnormalities. An abortion would be permitted *only* to save the mother's life. According to Horowitz, if the measure were to pass, Oregon would have the most restrictive abortion legislation in the country.

"The OCA crafted a measure designed to jump on the 'late abortion' bandwagon," says Maura Roche of Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Oregon. "But 12 weeks includes many early abortions, late abortions and those in between. This measure is far more extreme, and far more dangerous—it would make it much more difficult for a woman to receive a safe and legal abortion in Oregon."

In addition to banning virtually all abortions after 12 weeks, the proposed measure would grant to any Oregon resident or nonprofit entity legal standing to sue if they believe this law has been violated.

In other words, says Horowitz, any woman or physician even perceived to have received or provided an abortion close to the 12-week cutoff can be sued essentially by anyone.

The initiative would also require the state Legislature to "adopt statutes adequate to deter violations, in the next session after the measure passes. The session could not end until the new statutes are signed into law."

"So that means state legislators would have to pass anti-choice bills that would then have to be signed into law by the governor. If that didn't happen, the Legislature could not adjourn," says Horowitz. "That's outrageous."

Mabon is quoted as saying his group has, as of early June, collected just 45,000 signatures—less than half of those needed. "But the OCA's mechanisms for collecting signatures are very different from those used by the progressive community," says Horowitz. "We are out there gathering signatures in very public places. You don't see that with the OCA. They already have their own extensive donor list. They work through the church network. We must not underestimate their ability to get an anti-choice initiative on the ballot. They did it in 1986 and 1990, and they can do it again."

Horowitz is urging the public to get involved in the current effort to defeat the OCA's anti-abortion measure.

"There's lots to do. We need people to host house parties, to be part of a speakers' bureau, to be visible at fairs and festivals," she says. "We estimate we'll have to raise \$1 million for this campaign."

She adds: "The OCA has everything invested in this measure. People in the gay and lesbian community and larger progressive community sometimes fail to realize that the OCA isn't only against gays. They are returning to their roots. They started out attacking abortion rights, and they've now come back to that."

*Anyone interested in fighting the OCA's anti-abortion-rights initiative should contact ProChoice Oregon at 229-0330.*



Lon Mabon

PHOTO BY CATHERINE STAUFFER