POLITICAL ROUNDUP

The OCA is having a bad day, while an Oregon senator is fighting the good fight in the nation's capital

OCA: FROM MOVER AND SHAKER TO SHAKY GROUND?

s the Oregon Citizens Alliance about to evaporate?

One may believe so given the group's failure to qualify two initiatives for the November bal-

Unlike the heated heyday of 1992 when the OCA's anti-gay Measure 9 drew copious media attention and voter support (though it subsequently lost), relatively few seemed to notice when, in early July, the OCA failed to gather enough signatures to place a new anti-gay, antitrans measure on the ballot.

The proposed constitutional amendment

sought in part to prohibit state and local governments from providing benefits to employees' unmarried partners. It also aimed to establish a definition of "family" for government purposes as a marriage between a man and a woman.

Additionally, the measure read, "With reference to the term one man and one woman, the People further recognize and, therefore, establish as public policy that the concept of the male/female relationship of sexual affection is that which

is natural to mankind and that male/female gender is determined at the moment of conception."

Some public agencies, including the cities of Eugene and Portland, and Benton and Multnomah counties, provide benefits to employees' unmarried partners. Under the measure, state and local governments would have only been allowed to provide benefits to those fitting the legal definition of family-namely, married heterosexuals.

Measure supporters needed to submit 97,681 valid voter signatures by July 2. The OCA was reportedly only able to garner about 80,000 sig-

Group backers did turn in 100,711 signatures promoting a constitutional amendment to ban abortions in Oregon after the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. According to the state Elections Division, however, they gathered just under 90,000 valid signatures, well short of the number needed.

The instability has prompted Lon Mabon, OCA chairman, to make a public pronouncement that his nearly decade-old group may soon disband. Mabon has reportedly called a July 18 board meeting to come to a decision.

"But I think that's highly unlikely," assesses Bill Lunch, an Oregon State University political science professor and a frequent commentator for Oregon Public Broadcasting.

"This was a calculated move by Mabon to motivate and stimulate his supporters to say, 'No, don't do that,' and re-energize his base," says Lunch, who estimates the OCA's positions appeal to as much as 15 percent of Oregon's

He adds that the OCA struggled to collect



A scene from the OCA's better days

enough signatures in part because Mabon has burned some bridges with allies who would have previously assisted in his efforts.

Lunch also says the rise of paid signature gatherers within the conservative movement has also been hurtful.

"Mabon views his work as a moral crusade and objects to paying people to gather signatures," he explains. "We're seeing a situation where some people who in the past may have circulated for the OCA for free have been lured away by the likes of, for example, Bill Sizemore, because they can make a couple thousand bucks collecting signatures for him."

March Westerling is the executive director of the Rural Organizing Project, a grass-roots network of community human rights groups throughout Oregon.

During the past several months, ROP supporters attended OCA-related events to get a sense of how the signature-gathering campaign was coming along.

"Based on our anecdotal evidence, this was no surprise," says Westerling. "From what we were hearing all along, we felt if anything was going to make it to the ballot, it would be the anti-choice measure."

Westerling suggests the time of single-issue politics is winding down in Oregon. Multi-issue politics—that is, movements that address myriad issues—is the wave of the future, and one to which the right-wing movement is struggling to respond.

"The right is reshuffling," she says. "They're at a point where they are trying to figure out who they are and what they're about."

■ Reported by INGA SORENSEN

WYDEN SPONSORS HATE CRIMES MEASURE

ur country's history has been, and continues to be, marred by incidents of violence. Some of the ugliest of these incidents are moti-

vated by hatred based on g race, color, religion and other characteristics," said 8 Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, his voice laden with emotion and sincerity.

He was opening a July 8 hearing of the Judiciary Committee on the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, a measure sponsored by Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden and Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy, both Democrats, and Republican Arlen Specter Pennsylvania.

Kennedy pointed to the example of James Byrd Jr., the 49-year-old African American recently assaulted by a trio of racists who chained Byrd to the back of a truck

and dragged him to his death. "That atrocity shocked the conscience of the country, and a strong response is clearly needed," said Kennedy. "Hate crimes are a form of terrorism. They have a psychological and emotional impact which extends far beyond the victim. They threaten the entire community and undermine the ideals on which the nation was founded. We need to send the strongest possible signal that hate crimes will not be tolerated."

The measure would amend existing federal

legislation in two ways: It would loosen the restrictions on federal intervention and would add sexual orientation, gender and disability to the categories covered.

Current law stipulates stronger punishment only for crimes motivated by race, color, religion or national origin.

Eric H. Holder Jr., U.S. deputy attorney general, told the Judiciary Committee intervention limitations "have prevented the federal government from investigating and prosecuting a significant number of violent bias incidents."

The proposed legislation, meanwhile, has its critics. Edward Jagels, a California state attorney, said he fears "turf battles" between state and local authorties.

Chai Feldblum, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center and a frequent consultant to gay and lesbian organizations, testified the bill "has clearly been crafted with a keen understanding of the the limits of power of Congress."

The emotional high point of the hearing was testimony by Renee Mullins, Byrd's eldest daughter.

In a voice at times breaking with emotion, she said: "As Americans—and human beings in general—we have choices in life: to hate or not to hate; to kill or not to kill; to be a leader or a follower. The men who murdered my father had

> a choice that morning. And they chose violence. Therefore, the laws of the land should punish them."

> Hatch closed the hearing by stating, "I think you should presume we are going to do something. You should help us do it right."

> Later, while speaking to reporters, Hatch expressed his feeling that the current legislation is "too broadly written" and "appears to be unconstitutional."

He said he was committed to trying to move a rewritten version of the bill

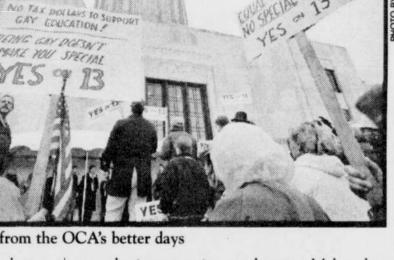
this session, though he admitted that might not be possible. Hatch called the measure "a controversial bill" in the minds of some.

The House has scheduled a hearing on the bill for July 22.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde, an Illinois Republican who was instrumental in gaining passage of the Hate Crimes Statistics Act several years ago, has publicly stated his support for the concept of a Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

■ Reported by BOB ROEHR





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