

ACT ONE

Basic Rights Oregon launches a campaign against the Oregon Citizens Alliance's latest initiative by Jonathan Kipp

After a six-year absence from the ballot, the Oregon Citizens Alliance has returned with another anti-gay initiative for Oregonians to ponder. Although state election officials haven't yet confirmed the "Student Protection Act" will appear on the Nov. 7 ballot, gay activists insist it will be there.

Many thought the OCA was defunct after losing two efforts to codify its anti-homosexual beliefs in the early '90s and failing even to get on the ballot in 1996 and '98. But the alliance is not only back, it is said to be more sophisticated and better funded—and this time, it has brought along some serious help.

Although Balboa and Sullivan say the initiative's passage would have severe consequences for sexual minorities, their biggest concern at this point is for children. The Student Protection Act would put kids in danger, they say.

Mabon and the OCA want to rid schools of HIV and AIDS education, and the Student Protection Act would accomplish that. Voter approval of the act, Sullivan says, would censor critical information kids need to keep themselves safe.

Voters with whom her team has talked also are concerned about schoolchildren learning the values of respect and fairness. Opponents of the Student Protection Act say it selects one group of Oregonians and singles them out for harassment, discrimination and hatred. Sullivan thinks voters want their schools to reinforce values, all right—values of respect and compassion, not harassment and fear.

Oregonians like their autonomy, she says. But the OCA's initiative calls for a statewide mandate that essentially takes control away from local parents, teachers and school boards. If the act becomes law, special interests will have the right to tell voters what should and should not be taught to their children. Sullivan says allowing one special interest to impose its values on Oregon's kids will open the door for any special interest group to do the same.

According to BRO, what voters are worried about in schools is not the promotion of homosexuality but lack of funding, overcrowding, lack of parental involvement and violence. Schools need stable financing, and parents know that, Sullivan says. The OCA's measure threatens to cut state funding for schools that violate its prohibitions.

The secretary of state's office should be making an announcement about the initiative's future any day now, Sullivan says. BRO has budgeted \$1.1 million to defeat the measure, but it might take more.

"I'm not convinced \$1.1 [million] will win this campaign," Sullivan says. "There are so many initiatives to compete with."

Organizers plan to raise most of the money in the coming weeks. "We're going to raise the lion's share right here in Oregon," Balboa says.

Although Balboa and Sullivan say they have an excellent staff already in line and volunteers regularly calling to help, they fear the average Oregonian isn't yet aware of the OCA's intent. "For the most part, people are unaware that this is happening," Sullivan says.

Whether by door-to-door canvassers or via media blitz, it is only a matter of time until Oregon's residents, straight and gay, learn about what is ahead. But for those who are a part of the pending political battle, the race already has started.

"We're going to fight this tooth and nail until November," Balboa says.



Jaime Balboa (left) and Kathleen Sullivan

The Student Protection Act received more than enough signatures—83,281 were submitted, according to the OCA—by the July 7 deadline to procure a spot on November's ballot.

Jaime Balboa, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, the state's largest gay political organization, isn't waiting around for the secretary of state's office to authenticate the signatures.

"He got it," Balboa says of OCA leader Lon Mabon. Balboa says Mabon turns in the cleanest petitions of any group in Oregon and expects less than 10 percent of the signatures to be disqualified. The alliance's petitions exceeded the required 66,786 signatures by about 24 percent.

The OCA has joined forces with the Oregon Christian Coalition and is receiving support from the Family Research Council, a Washington, D.C.-based Christian organization, to pass the Student Protection Act in November.

The council believes "homosexuality is unhealthy, immoral and destructive to individuals, families and societies." The group calls for compassion, rather than bigotry, to support healthy healing for homosexuals who want to change their sexual orientation, according to its literature. The council is said to have extraordinary financial resources, although figures are not available on its Internet site.

Balboa and campaign manager Kathleen Sullivan spoke to *Just Out* about the seriousness of the OCA's latest effort. Their somber demeanor revealed as much about their concern as did their articulate presentation.

MARVIN SALLES
Associate Broker

- * Innovative Marketer
- * Experienced Buyer's Agent
- * Attentive Listener

503.320.1271
www.marvinsalles.com

John C. Scott
REAL ESTATE

"Family" Rates

Be Safe
Be Strong
Be Free
Get BUFF!
Come Practice
Poekoelan
Kung Fu
Meet me at...

One With Heart
Martial Arts Institute
SE 43rd & Hawthorne
231-1999

CH MORTGAGE

- Fast 15 to 20 day closings
- Instant approval at your home or office
- Good or bad credit
- 0% down programs
- Apply online at www.CH-Mortgage.com

EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

Phone: (503) 294-0044
Fax: (503) 294-7115
Cell: (503) 577-1981
5125 S.W. MACADAM • SUITE 145
PORTLAND, OR 97219
Email: Cgraunitz@CH-Mortgage.com

Cory Graunitz
Loan Officer

BOOKS
Latest in Gay Travel, Fiction & More

VIDEOS
Happy Texas, Boys Don't Cry & More

DVDS
Rental & Sales on the latest titles!

Gai-Pied
2544 NE Broadway Ph 331.1125

► Great Discounts On Our Website: www.gaipied.com