

The collective sigh of relief in response to Measure 9's defeat was barely over when Lon Mabon announced his latest anti-gay scheme late last month.

The Oregon Citizens Alliance has filed a new initiative—dubbed the Student Protection Act II—with the secretary of state's office. If it passes legal scrutiny and the OCA collects enough petition signatures, the measure will appear on the ballot in 2002.

The new initiative's wording is similar to Measure 9, but Mabon has made what he thinks are significant changes that will make it harder to defeat. Had Measure 9 passed, any activity in public schools that "encourages, promotes or sanctions" behaviors related to homosexuality and bisexuality would have been illegal. The new initiative says sexual orientation "shall not be taught in Oregon public schools in a manner that would express approval of, promote or endorse homosexual or bisexual behaviors."

The biggest change, however, is how the initiative deals with HIV/AIDS education—the focus of the contentious political fight last fall. Measure 9's opponents insisted it would have eliminated HIV/AIDS education and risked young lives. Some thought the issue helped get the measure defeated.

To counter those claims, the newest OCA wording attempts to spell out what the initiative would and would not do. "Age-appropriate, objective and factual" AIDS education and instruction regarding human sexuality would not be limited, according to the initiative's wording.

But Jaime Balboa, Basic Rights Oregon executive director, says Mabon and the OCA's words aren't as important as their actions. The measure, no matter the wording, "is expressly

BACK TO SCHOOL

Oregon Citizens Alliance launches new anti-gay effort

by Jonathan Kipp

written to stigmatize us as individuals."

The initiative, if passed, would create a group of second-class citizens, Balboa says. "Students can't learn when they are stigmatized, harassed and in fear."

But Balboa says that the initiative could be problematic and that Mabon has made some clever and pernicious changes. "If they qualify, it will be very tough to defeat."

Many thought the OCA's third defeat in eight years would be the end of the road for the conservative Christian organization, now infamous nationwide for its anti-gay agenda. Even Mabon suspected a third defeat would imperil the group.

The organization experienced widely publicized financial problems during the campaign—spending only \$200,000 on its effort—but still managed to garner 47 percent of the vote in November. The No on 9 camp raised and spent more than \$1.45 million to win the race with 53 percent of the vote.

The campaign drew some criticism for its hardcore commitment to stick with one message. Some thought it lacked the grassroots quality of previous efforts.

Balboa scoffs at the notion. More than \$280,000 was raised at house parties across the state, and the campaign partnered with more than 500 organizations and elected officials. "That's a very strong indicator of grass roots," Balboa says.

He admits that the campaign was "message

disciplined" and that it was not particularly geared toward base supporters but honed in on those who were undecided—about one-third of all voters. Any campaign that focuses on firing up the base isn't going to win, he explains.

Balboa was right: Measure 9 failed by a 6 percent margin—one of only two anti-gay measures around the country that didn't pass. Although victory was sweet, he says it was tainted for some.

"It was a traumatic experience to defeat Balboa Measure 9," Balboa says, comparing the struggle to fighting off a schoolyard bully. "Just because we were successful doesn't mean for everyone (it was) a positive experience."

Despite the victory, the community has to stay together and continue to organize, Balboa says. "The work of BRO doesn't stop because the ballot measure is over."

The 2001 legislative session commences soon, and Balboa and company will be at the center of the game. The organization, the largest gay rights group in the state, helped defeat nine anti-gay bills during the 1999 session despite early promises from the legislative leadership that no socially controversial bills would be written.

Although Balboa hopes this session will



Victory was sweet but exhausting for the No on 9 Campaign

have fewer fires to put out, he remains realistic. "We need to remain organized as Basic Rights Oregon has been through the course of campaigning," he says.

More than 7,500 volunteers were utilized during the No on 9 Campaign. Balboa hopes many of those people will stay involved. Fund raising will continue as well.

Equally important in preparing for impending political battles is the community itself. Balboa says unity is needed during these times.

He thinks it is possible to stay focused while making the community's diversity a strength. "I hope we can stick together and have homophobia and the OCA as our primary opposition." **JN**

For more information about BASIC RIGHTS OREGON, call 503-222-6151 or visit the Internet site www.basicrights.org.



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