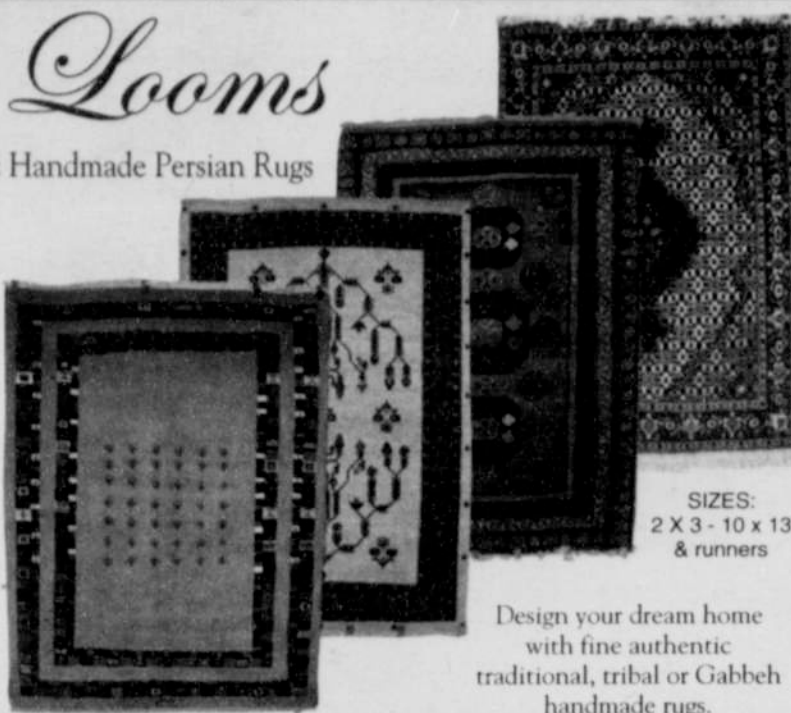


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northwest Referenda Campaign Fails

New laws go into effect in January

by Julie Sabatier

The sexual minorities community breathed a collective sigh of relief Oct. 12. Word came from Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury's office that the ad hoc group seeking to refer the state's nondiscrimination law to the November 2008 ballot had failed to collect the 55,179 valid signatures it needed to do so. This news came four days after the announcement that the group had failed to gather enough valid signatures to refer the domestic partnership law to the ballot. Both laws, passed in the 2007 legislative session, will go into effect Jan. 1, 2008.

"We are so ecstatic and thrilled and relieved. It's just a historic week for Oregon," said John Hummel, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon. "I think that the fact that they were unable to meet even this extremely low signature threshold shows just how out of step this small group of extremists are with Oregon values."

A number of groups mobilized signature gatherers—Restore America and Defense of Marriage and Family AGAIN! among them—although none had the fund-raising power of the Oregon Family Council, a Christian group responsible for putting Measure 36 (which banned same-sex marriage in the state) on the 2004 ballot. The council announced early that it would not be a part of the referendum effort.

"We're a multi-issue organization," said council spokesman Nick Graham. "We simply can't run a referendum on everything we disagree with the Legislature about, and this is just another example."

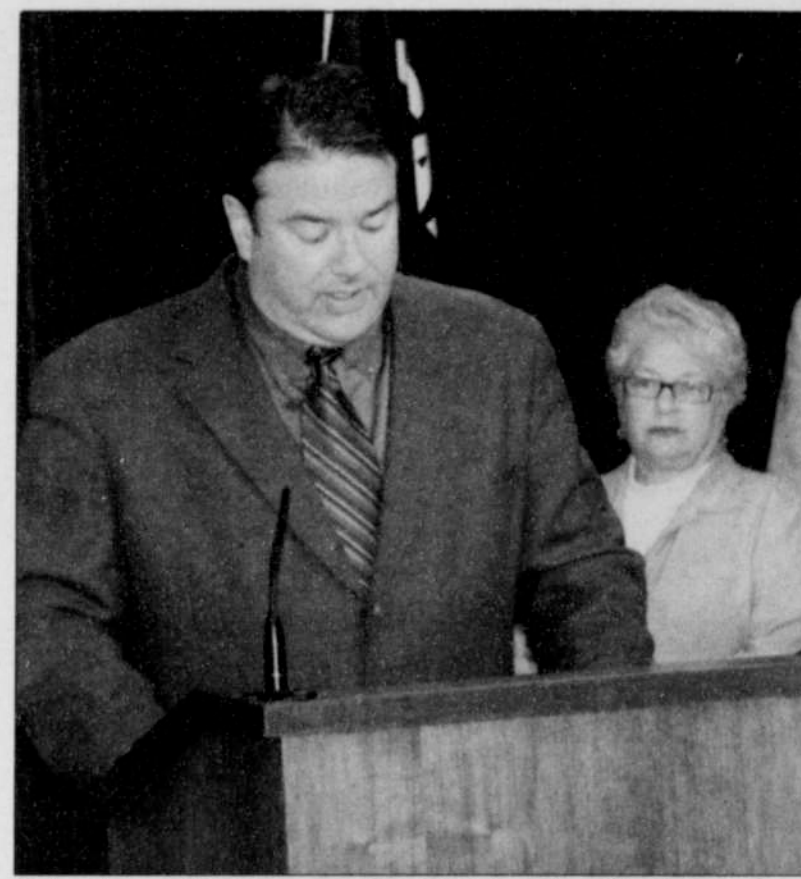
Members of the Oregon Constitution Party did get involved, although chairman Jack Brown stressed that the party itself was not a part of the referendum campaign in any official capacity. He gathered signatures in his hometown of Grants Pass and says he was frustrated by the lack of leadership in the signature-gathering effort.

"It was like a jellyfish; it had no form," he said. "There were several groups that were all working it; some were more nebulous than others."

The groups collected 60,531 signatures for the petition to put the domestic partnership law before voters in November. Of those 60,531 signatures, 55,063 were valid, according to Bradbury's office. With an unprecedented 90.97 percent validity rate, the groups still fell 116 signatures short of what it needed.

The numbers for the referendum on the non-discrimination law were even lower. Of the 59,761 signatures collected, only 53,875 were valid. Even with another unusually high validity rate of 90.15 percent, the groups still needed 1,304 more signatures.

"We just didn't quite get enough.... We wished it would have passed, but we're not discouraged," said former state Sen. Marilyn Shannon, R-Salem, spokeswoman for the chief petitioners.



John Hummel told a group Sept. 26 in Salem that Basic Rights Oregon would monitor the verification process.

According to Shannon, the petitioners have decided not to take legal action at this point. "The chief petitioners are not going to pursue suing [the secretary of state], but other people might," she said. "There are some attorneys looking into it."

Both Shannon's group and Restore America have said they will move forward with an effort to put a repeal initiative before voters in November 2008 in lieu of the referenda. The groups would need to gather 82,769 valid signatures by July 3, 2008, to be successful in this campaign.

"We really don't know what Oregon thinks about this until Oregon votes," said Shannon. Graham confirmed that the Oregon Family Council will not take part in the repeal effort.

Hummel says BRO is ready for a repeal campaign. "Basic Rights Oregon is going to work day and night until the deadline for filing an initiative to make sure they don't make the ballot on that also. The wonderful news here is that the laws will go into effect on Jan. 1, and that's going to be very difficult for our opposition to face."

A smaller group, which emerged in opposition to the referendum campaign, says it is not going forward to combat a possible repeal. Know Thy Neighbor Oregon, which pledged to publish on its Web site the names and addresses of those who signed the referendum petitions if they qualified for the ballot, will not post the information.

"There are many reasons for it," spokesman Brandon Berg told *Just Out* via e-mail. "One being that it would provide the opposition with a direct link to a database of folks for them to contact if they attempt a repeal in 2008."

Berg added that he hoped his all-volunteer organization had done something to discourage people from signing the petitions. "If it did, in fact, act as a deterrent, it was simply because anti-gay Oregonians didn't want their family, friends and neighbors to know that they signed their name in support of blatant discrimination," he said. 10