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## The Bus Driver

*TriMet retiree Ben Fain gets behind the wheel again for the cause*

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In 26 years driving buses at TriMet, Ben Fain was a loyal if not particularly active member of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Division 757.

Since his 2002 retirement, however, he's become a bus-borne activist — chauffeuring the mostly young progressives of the Bus Project to political happenings and door-to-door canvasses.

The Bus Project is best-known for mobilizing busloads of volunteers to do a day's work for progressive candidates in close electoral races. Since 2002, the group's volunteers have knocked on 200,000 doors and contributed to the election of over a dozen state legislators, said Bus Project managing director Garrett Downen. And the group has close ties to several politically-active unions. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the American Federation of Teach-

ers-Oregon, and the Carpenters Union have sponsored bus trips; other unions have made donations. Bus Project co-founder Joe Baessler became Oregon AFSCME's political coordinator.

Fain climbed aboard the Bus Project when it was still an idea. At a Christmas holiday family reunion in 2001, his sister's grandson, Aaron Imlah, asked him if he would drive a bus for a group he was helping form.

"They had a bus without a driver, and I was a driver without a bus," Fain recalls.

Fain, 67, said he had always voted for progressive politicians and issues, but retirement would open up much more time to get involved.

He decided to keep his commercial driver's license active and drive the bus, a 1978 MCI Crusader converted to biodiesel.

Fain thinks he's done probably 95 percent of the driving since the project began. Volunteering sparked a political awakening for him. It strengthened his belief in the importance of unions and the power of individuals to make change by coming together.

Fain, the son of a bricklayer, worked in union jobs all his life, starting in the early 1950s with the Bricklayers Union, continuing as a Boeing

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### In Oregon

## New Yorker pours \$2.8 million into ballot measures

Out-of-state money has made itself felt in Oregon politics before, but a pair of ballot measures up for a vote this November has Oregonians wondering about how thoroughly their citizen initiative process can be hijacked to serve a private agenda.

As detailed in three sets of mandatory campaign finance disclosures, every phase of Ballot measures 45 and 48 has been almost entirely financed by one individual — conservative New York real estate millionaire Howard Rich. Measure 45 would set term limits for state elected officials, and Measure 48 would set an inflexible limit on state spending; both are opposed by the Oregon AFL-CIO and other labor organizations.

Rich is founder and financier of the group Americans For Limited Government, which contends that government is doing too much, and is charging excessive taxes. But rather than focus on the federal government, which has been spending more than

it takes in since President Clinton left office, Rich's group is targeting state governments, which by law must live within their means.

Oregon is one of a number of states where Rich's millions have financed paid petitioners and political consultants to put identical questions before voters.

Such a top-down campaign is a far cry from the citizen uprisings Oregonians imagined when they set up the initiative system. It was supposed to be a way to get around the Oregon Legislature in cases where legislators were truly unresponsive to the popular will: If citizens gather signatures from enough fellow citizens, statutes and constitutional amendments go directly to the electorate for approval or rejection.

But the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1988 that states couldn't ban the use of paid petitioners, and that opened up the initiative

process for political experiments by deep-pocket ideologues and special favors for moneyed interests. Some initiatives still come about with grassroots citizen support, but almost every election also has measures that were bought and paid for by big money.

That's why New Yorker Howard Rich may be the most important man in Oregon this year. His proposals — Measures 45 and 48 — don't carry his name on them, but they come with his money.

Entities controlled by Rich have given \$2 million to a Missouri group pushing a spending cap, \$1 million to an Arizona group pushing a spending cap, and \$100,000 to an Oklahoma group.

Rich's contributions to Oregon ballot measure campaigns totalled \$2.8 million, the Oregonian reported Sept. 12. The most

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