

# Anti-gay groups had small successes, aim for bigger ones

By Valerie Richardson  
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DENVER — After a tumultuous year of dashed hopes and surprising successes, the anti-homosexual rights movement finds itself at a crossroads as the date nears for its first major East Coast campaign.

Despite a steady record of local victories, the movement has been unable to replicate its only statewide victory, Colorado's Amendment 2 in 1992. The only two state measures on the November ballot, Measure 13 in Oregon and Proposition 1 in Idaho, lost by razor-thin margins.

"In a year where we saw a sweep of conservatives, we also saw the defeat of both these initiatives and also a record number of gay and lesbian candidates elected," said Robert Bray, an organizer of Fight the Right in San Francisco, an arm of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

The results show that "people are more concerned about the economy and other issues than about these moral issues," said Patricia Peard, president of the Maine Civil Liberties Union.

Yet leaders of the anti-homosexual rights movement insist that 1994 was far from a debacle. Voters in Alachua County, Fla., and two Oregon counties passed measures barring homosexuals from gaining protected-class status under civil rights laws.

The nationwide conservative sweep also left the movement with some friends in high places. The Oregon Citizens Alliance, the nation's best-known anti-homosexual rights group, and its counterparts in Idaho and Washington all endorsed GOP congressional candidates who went on to win their seats.

"The movement is very healthy and wasn't hurt any by the last election," said Scott Lively, communications director for the Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA). "We saw a strong swing to the right, and I think that's going to translate into a decline of liberal support to fight the OCA and others."

He expects the movement to come back strong. Both Idaho and Oregon are gearing up for another statewide ballot fight in 1996, as are organizers in Nevada and Washington. Their best chance for a big win in 1995 lies in Maine, the site of the movement's first statewide contest east of the Mississippi.

Last year, Concerned Maine Families, the state's anti-homosexual rights group, gathered more than enough certified signatures to put an anti-homosexual rights measure on the ballot. Barring a successful court challenge, the initiative will go before the voters next November.

The Maine measure represents a shift in strategy for the movement. Instead of naming homosexuals as a group to be excluded from protected-class status, the proposal lists the minority groups now included in the Maine Human Rights Act and states that no more may be added.

Organizers are hoping the list

approach, authored by constitutional scholar and conservative columnist Bruce Fein, will help them avoid the court defeats suffered by other measures, including Colorado's Amendment 2. That initiative, overturned by the Colorado Supreme Court in October, is being appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"I describe it as pro-civil rights, not anti-gay rights," said Carolyn Cosby, president of Concerned Maine Families. "It protects the boundaries of what civil-rights protections are supposed to be. . . . I don't want to see [the civil-rights law] become a grab bag of special government privileges for special-interest groups."

Mr. Bray said the shift amounted to little more than marketing. "The downplaying of the rhetoric and the tweaking of the language to make it more palatable to the public at large are the big changes," the homosexual-rights activist said.

If Maine remains the lone state with an anti-homosexual rights measure on the 1995 ballot, organizers on both sides predict a big fight as conservative and homosexual activists focus their resources on the only game in town.

That could benefit homosexual-rights activists, who have consistently outraised and outspent the competition. In Idaho, for example, opponents of Proposition 1 collected about \$700,000, while the Idaho Citizens Alliance ran its campaign on less than \$200,000.

"It all comes down to money. And we're going to focus more carefully on fund raising in the future," said Mr. Lively, who said proponents of Measure 13 were outspent 7 to 1.

Another critical factor in both the Oregon and Idaho campaigns was a pair of late-breaking, highly publicized articles linking the anti-homosexual rights movement to the radical fringe. Three weeks before the election, the OCA came under fire from Jewish groups after the Oregonian ran an article under the headline "OCA claims that gays were behind Holocaust."

The story was based on lectures delivered by Mr. Lively on homosexuality within the Third Reich. Mr. Lively, who is writing a book on the topic, denied blaming the Holocaust on homosexuals and demanded a retraction but admitted the damage had been done.

In Idaho, the Idaho Citizens Alliance took a hit when it was reported that Jeremiah Films, which produced the video "Gay Rights, Special Rights" used in the campaign, also was responsible for anti-Mormon films. In 1994, Mormons accounted for 23 percent of the statewide vote, more than enough to swing the final tally, 201,697 to 204,588.

Kelly Walton, president of the Idaho Citizens Alliance, estimated the disclosure cost the campaign about 5 percent of the Mormon vote. But Proposition 1 also was hurt by sheer confusion: Exit polls found that as many as 20 percent of voters said they thought a "yes" vote was a vote in favor of homosexual rights.

In fact, the reverse was true.