

# NATION

## Maine voters mull repeal of homosexual-protection law

By Ralph Z. Hallow  
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In a hotly contested special election being closely watched around the country, Maine voters decided yesterday whether their state would become the first in the nation to repeal a homosexual-protection law.

Organizers of the effort to repeal the law, enacted only last June, said they believe the support for granting what they call special privileges for homosexuals is now declining.

"Until now, it has been looking as if homosexual rights were sweeping the nation," said Mike Heath, executive director of the Christian Civic League of Maine, which helped gather the required

signatures to get the referendum on the ballot.

"My sense is we are at a turning point, based on what happened in Washington state and here in Maine," Mr. Heath said. He noted that Washington voters defeated that state's proposed homosexual-rights law 60 percent to 40 percent.

He said even his own repeal forces were "astounded" that in so liberal a state as Maine, they had managed to attract 1,201 volunteers to gather 59,000 certified signatures on the petition between June 1 and Sept. 18.

Paul Volle, executive director of the Maine chapter of Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, said his group's poll of likely voters found 67 percent favored repeal. But a recent independent survey found

almost 65 percent of registered voters opposed the referendum.

Homosexual-rights advocates say the law is necessary to help them fight what they call a pattern of discrimination.

"You can be fired in 40 states simply for being gay," said David Smith, spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign, a national homosexual-rights organization. "Our opponents say we want special rights, but all we're seeking is equal rights."

Mr. Smith said there "is anecdotal evidence that gays are being fired all over the country, but it is hard to quantify because there is no protection on the books."

Outside organizations plowed money and effort into the campaign on both sides of the issue.

Repeal supporters said they spent about \$150,000 and the pro-homosexual rights groups said they spent nearly \$500,000.

The national Christian Coalition and Gary Bauer's pro-family group American Renewal invested time and money in the repeal campaign.

Mr. Bauer's lobbying organization invested \$30,000 in advertising for the repeal campaign and sent five formerly homosexual men, all now married and with children of their own, to tell voters that homosexuality is not a genetic or immutable condition that requires civil rights protections.

Mr. Heath said a vote for repeal is not a vote for discrimination. "We don't feel we are denying anybody access to credit or jobs," he

said. "Folks who are discreet about their sexual practices are not and never have been denied credit, public accommodations or employment in Maine, although there are isolated cases to the contrary."

Homosexual-protection laws are on the books in the District and in 11 states: California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin, New Hampshire and Maine.

Eight other states are under executive order not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation in state employment: Colorado, Louisiana, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Washington.

Homosexuals also enjoy legal protection in Baltimore; Phoenix;

Chicago; Boston; Cleveland; Portland, Ore.; Portland, Maine; Detroit; Atlanta; Bloomington, Ind.; and Miami Beach.

Jurisdictions that have overturned homosexual-protection laws include Tampa, Fla.; Cincinnati; Salt Lake City; Lewiston, Maine; Springfield, Mo.; and Ferndale, Mich.

In 1992, Oregon voters rejected a proposed constitutional amendment to label homosexuality as "abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse." But in the same year, Colorado voters approved a law forbidding the courts, the state Legislature and local governments to approve homosexual-rights measures. In 1996, the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated the Colorado law as unconstitutional.

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