

Rural Organizing Project 2008 Grassroots Civic Engagement
Supporting Rural Voters from Start to Finish and Beyond on Election Day
Tuesday, November 4th, 2008

HISTORY: BUILDING A PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT IN RURAL OREGON SINCE 1992

Rural Organizing Project exists to advance democracy in small town and rural Oregon by working with leaders of more than 60 local human dignity groups. Since our beginning in 1992, we have advocated that a strong democracy requires an engaged and educated citizenry. From the early defeat of an anti-democratic ballot measure targeting gay and lesbian people to challenging this year's election-time attempts to blame immigrants for our country's economic problems, ROP has united rural communities in the face of divisive issues that are conventionally considered to be big hits among rural voters. Through our values-based approach that affirms our common desire for democracy and human dignity, we have successfully contested the notion for over a decade that rural America is a ready-made base for the Right.



ISSUES: IMMIGRANTS, AND CRIME, AND UNIONS, OH MY!

As early as November of 2007, ROP began working with our groups to anticipate the significance of the 2008 election. As a non-partisan organization in a state that regularly faces a dozen or more statewide ballot initiatives from a small but well-funded conservative group of anti-tax, anti-union, anti-queer, and anti-immigrant activists, we knew that we would have our election work cut out for us. That proved to be true as we faced a slate of 12 ballot measures, including proposals to limit ESL to no more than 2 years, increase mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent crimes, institute teaching to the test by linking teacher salaries to classroom performance, prevent union members from choosing voluntary paycheck deductions, cut education funding, and gut the state budget. On top of these state issues, in July of 2007, two local level initiatives started down the road to the ballot. By August of 2008, this pair of employer-sanction anti-immigrant ballot measures had qualified for the ballot in Columbia County, a rural county in the NW part of the state.



VISION: LOOKING BEYOND THE FINISH LINE OF ELECTION DAY

ROP's local human dignity groups span the state in nearly all of Oregon's 36 counties. We organize to get out the vote for justice on Election Day, but just as importantly, we organize beyond the finish line of November 4th so that we create a growing movement for justice in rural Oregon. Our goal is not just to turn out voters to support good policy at the polls every two or four years, but to create a culture of organizing and a progressive infrastructure that can create the fundamental change that we need. We build grassroots power to address the needs of our communities directly by running our own campaigns, holding our elected officials accountable throughout the year, and becoming a much stronger democracy that is truly by, for, and of the people.

APPROACH: NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR ORGANIZING, ONE CONVERSATION AT A TIME

ROP began our civic engagement work by listening to what our neighbors thought about key issues of the day. Using a short survey, volunteers went door to door "taking voters' temperature on hot election year issues" and sharing a preliminary Freedom Voters Guide and Pledge that challenged voters to use their power as voters *before* Election Day. ROP encouraged voters to ask tough questions of candidates and in the media that expose the threats to our democracy after nearly a decade of erosions of civil liberties, war abroad for oil and corporate profits, and targeting of immigrants in the name of the so-called war on terror. The survey and pledge also helped us identify voters who were hot and warm to our values so that we could engage them in our ongoing work. Everyone who completed a survey was sent a friendly, personalized thank you note. Our third contact

with our hots and warmers was a courtesy call to invite them to attend a ballot measure forum in their community or to let them know that a friendly neighbor from their local human dignity group would be dropping by with ROP's helpful STAND Voters Guide by and for small town voters. Ballot forums were held throughout the month of October while STAND Voters Guides were distributed beginning in early October to allow voters to distinguish our down home guide from the slick campaign mailers that would soon inundate them. All of our hots are also integrated into local group communication systems and will be prioritized for post election invitations to Welcome Wagon events that combine socializing and election debrief conversations.

NUMBERS: MEASURING OUR IMPACT

Collectively ROP worked statewide in all 36 of Oregon's counties with 412 volunteers who knocked on more than 35,110 doors and made more than 6365 phone calls.

36 Ballot Measure Forums in 22 of Oregon's 36 Counties

- 871 people attended and were trained in how to discuss the 12 statewide ballot measures



65,000 Ballot Measure Guides Distributed in All 36 Counties

- 289 volunteers
- 46,415 by hand
- 18,585 by mail
- 11,800 were personalized to include hand written addresses and inserts from the local group
- 1961 Courtesy Calls in advance of Ballot Measure Forums and STAND Distribution

1051 Voters Contacted through Surveys and Pledges

- Over half (536) were collected in Oregon's 2nd Congressional District which comprises rural and frontier Eastern and Central Oregon

While voter turnout rates will not be completely known until after Election Day, as of the morning of Tuesday, November 4th, 85% of ROP members (4748 voters) had returned their ballots and 86% of the hots and warmers who completed our initial survey had voted. This compares with a statewide voter return rate of 55% on November 2nd according to the latest figures from the Secretary of State.

In Columbia County, Oregon alone where our local human dignity group led a coalition effort to defeat two local anti-immigrant ballot measures:

- 116 volunteers made 4404 phone calls and made personal contact with 1981 voters
- 123 volunteers knocked on 3380 doors and made personal contact with 1401 voters

Survey Says... Rural Voters are Freedom Voters! (www.FreedomVoters.com)

1. Do you think the war in Iraq is making the U.S. safer?			2. The Bill of Rights protects against detention without due process and torture. Is our country's violation of these rights justified?			3. Is it important to you that all Oregon drivers have the opportunity to be tested, licensed, and insured regardless of immigration status?			4. OR spends more on prisons than higher education. Should we keep expanding prisons by passing mandatory minimums for non-violent crime?			5. Should we use local police budgets to enforce federal immigration law?		
Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure
5.0%	90.8%	4.6%	8.5%	85.3%	7.5%	74.3%	20.3%	5.9%	4.6%	88.4%	7.0%	9.5%	84.8%	5.5%