

EIR Feature

'Stop AIDS' initiative back on California ballot

by Warren J. Hamerman

On Nov. 30, the California secretary of state announced that an emergency public health referendum to stop the spread of AIDS—virtually identical in wording to last year's famous Proposition 64—had qualified for the June 1988 California ballot. The secretary of state said that, with 54 of 58 counties reporting, the initiative had a minimum of 508,695 projected valid signatures, about 100,000 more than required by law to qualify for the ballot. About 725,000 California registered voters had signed their names to petitions which had been delivered to counties around the state at the end of October.

The AIDS Initiative Statute, as it is technically called, defines AIDS, and the condition of being a carrier of the HTLV-III (HIV) virus (or any other virus which may be found to cause AIDS), as legally "infectious and communicable," as they are in fact.

Furthermore, the initiative would place AIDS and this condition on the "reportable diseases and conditions" list, a list already maintained by the Department of Health Services, according to statute. This list already contains virtually all dangerous communicable diseases and conditions, such as German measles, typhus, tuberculosis, plague, and so forth. Once AIDS, and the condition of being an HTLV-III (HIV) carrier, are on this list, all those existing public health statutes and codes which presently apply to every other communicable disease, will apply to AIDS and its carrier form, as well.

The qualification of the California ballot initiative contrasts strongly with the persistent record of inaction, cover-up, and stalling by federal officials who are under orders from the White House *not* to spend money for an all-out fight against the pandemic. At a White House news conference on Dec. 3, Secretary of Health and Human Services Otis Bowen unsuccessfully tried to maintain that the number of AIDS-infected in the United States has not changed in over 18 months, when the Public Health Service first announced that 1-1.5 million Americans were infected. Under questioning, three government health spokesmen—Bowen, James Mason (director of the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control), and James D. Watkins (chairman of the Presidential AIDS Commission)—all admitted that the true extent



California voters sign up to place the AIDS Initiative Statute on the ballot. This time around, the most fanatic opponents of the initiative are in disarray.

of the penetration of the AIDS infection into the United States remains uncertain. Watkins stated that the old June 1986 figures are "rough," and that researchers need to find out how many Americans are really infected.

PANIC seen as likely to pass

Khushro Ghandi, the president of Prevent AIDS Now In California (PANIC), which sponsored the newly qualified initiative as well as last year's Proposition 64, commented on why he and initiative co-proponent Brian Lantz were resubmitting the measure: "Up to eight weeks before the November 1986 elections, private polls indicated that Proposition 64 might very well pass. In the last months of that campaign a massive, well-financed campaign of deliberate lies was waged to confuse and misinform voters. The lies were about both the content of the initiative, which was wildly and deliberately mischaracterized, and perhaps more pernicious, about the AIDS threat itself.

"The opposition to Proposition 64 was composed of three rather well-defined groups: First, hard-core 'New Agers' and homosexual activists, including a portion of Hollywood's 'glitterati' who obsessively oppose any perceived threat to their innovative 'lifestyle.' Second, those who had no real disagreements with the contents of the initiative, but who were passionately concerned to stop Democratic presidential contender Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., one of the major endorsers of the measure. The third group was the leadership of the California Republican Party, who came out against the initiative after a significant factional battle, primarily because they, and the Ronald Reagan White House, were committed

to a low-budget approach to AIDS. The fact that this policy meant death and agony for millions of innocent people, was simply not of concern to them. After months of saying nothing, Gov. George Deukmejian finally came out against Proposition 64, and then promptly proceeded to cut the proposed state AIDS budget by 50%! It was this Republican opposition which was most effective in disorienting voters."

Ghandi predicted that the new measure would pass. He commented: "Now the political situation has fundamentally changed. AIDS has become a leading issue in the minds of voters. Most consider the current lack of public health measures to be a deadly error. Day after day, news reports confirm the warnings of those who organized for Proposition 64. Groups like the California Medical Association and the Republican Party, which opposed Proposition 64, have since been forced to acknowledge the necessity for public health measures. Hundreds of bills around the country proposing various degrees of public health measures are now before state legislatures. Voters today are more 'savvy,' and will swallow less in the way of extravagant lies."

Ghandi concluded: "Measures such as the current AIDS initiative will inevitably become law, as AIDS stalks the country and corpses pile up. The only question is whether we implement such measures now, or later—when AIDS may have already become unstoppable. We will never know how many people are presently dead or doomed because Proposition 64 did not pass. This new measure must pass. Discussions of cost are insanely immoral, with such a threat to human life looming over us. We can no longer sacrifice hecatombs to political or fiscal expediency."