



Oregon Voters Reject “Driver’s Cards” for Illegal Immigrants

Voters in Oregon overwhelmingly rejected a ballot measure on November 4 that would have upheld a law passed in 2013 granting “driver’s cards” to illegal immigrants. By a margin of 68 percent to 32 percent, voters in every one of Oregon’s 36 counties except for Multnomah (where Portland is located) rejected Ballot Measure 88 — a voters’ referendum on SB 833, a bill passed in the Oregon legislature and signed into law by Democratic Governor John Kitzhaber on May 1, 2013. SB 833 would have granted the cards (in lieu of driver’s licenses) to individuals “without requiring a person to provide proof of legal residence in the United States.”



SB 833 was originally scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2014, but was referred to Oregon voters to be voted on at the November general election. If Ballot Measure 88 had passed, the law would have taken effect on December 4, 2014. Having been rejected, the law is now dead.

The large margin by which the ballot measure was rejected was all the more notable in light of the fact that so-called “immigrant rights” groups outspent opponents 10 to one.

“It was really the epitome of a grassroots effort,” AP quoted Cynthia Kendoll, president of Oregonians for Immigration Reform, an organization that campaigned actively against the measure. “There’s such a disconnect between what people really want and what’s happening.”

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“We wanted to get it to the ballot, and we wanted to let Oregon voters decide this issue. I think they’ve spoken loud and clear,” Kendoll told the *Statesman Journal*, a major daily newspaper published in Salem.

Oregonians for Immigration Reform, and another group called Protect Oregon Driver Licenses (PODL), got the referendum on the ballot by working tirelessly to gather over 71,000 signatures in just a few months. Opponents of the measure to give driving privileges to illegal immigrants raised only \$37,000 to fight Measure 88, while the measure’s supporters in the “immigrant rights” lobby raised \$421,000 to support it.

The Portland-based newspaper, *The Oregonian*, reported Kendoll’s statement that the ballot results were a victory for those who are “sick and tired of big business, special interest groups and unions controlling our government.”

The activist said those groups are trying to define what the state’s laws look like but “Oregonians could see right through it.”



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Asked by the newspaper if she thought the measure might come back in future elections, Kendoll said she hoped not. She added that she doubts it would because “we’ve sent a strong enough message.”

The defeat of Measure 88 was supported by the Sheriffs of Oregon Political Action Committee, an organization representing the state’s sheriffs. The committee issued a press release in September stating: “The Sheriffs of Oregon support the citizens veto referendum #301 to overturn S.B. 833. We urge a NO vote.”

Clatsop County Sheriff Tom Bergin, a former president of the Association, told the press prior to the vote: “It is wrong to provide special driver’s licenses to people who cannot prove legal presence in the United States. For Oregon to do so, will only enhance the ability for criminal behavior, thus creating a larger risk to our citizens’ public safety. The Sheriffs of Oregon urge you to oppose this Measure.”

An article in *The Oregonian* in September quoted Dave Driscoll, a retired Salem police officer, who opposed allowing those who are here illegally being given authorization to drive in Oregon: “Fair, and equal treatment under the law. This is just a way for a select group of people to avoid Oregon law. It will not increase traffic safety or lower the number of uninsured drivers in this state. If allowed to stand Oregon could become a safe haven for criminals and terrorists.”

As significant as the odds were that Measure 88’s opponents had to overcome in order to achieve their victory (having had such a short time to gather the necessary signatures and being outspent by the measure’s supporters 10 to one) was the fact that Oregon has a history of being a heavily Democratic and politically very liberal state.

During the November 4 congressional elections, Oregonians reelected all five incumbents to the House, four Democrats and one Republican. They also reelected Governor Kitzhaber and Democratic U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley. Following the election, Oregon’s state senate during the next session will have 18 Democrats and 12 Republicans and the state House will have 35 Democrats and 25 Republicans. So Democrats ruled the day.

On other ballot questions, voters approved by 56 percent to 44 percent a measure legalizing personal possession, manufacture, and sale of marijuana for people 21 years of age and older. Voters also approved adding an equal rights amendment to the Oregon constitution by 64 percent to 36 percent.

With such strong support for the “liberal” side on these questions, the 66-percent rejection of driver’s cards for illegal immigrants — a decidedly “non-Obama-like” position — is all the more remarkable.

Media pundits have interpreted these results as sending a warning message to President Obama that a policy of granting amnesty to illegal immigrants might well backfire. Even liberals, it appears, are not always willing to break the rules for illegal immigrants.

As an AP report on the Oregon vote noted, Obama is considering executive actions, possibly as early as this week, to protect as many as five million illegal immigrants from deportation.

With some Republicans in Congress threatening a government shutdown if the president follows through, the president’s party may pay a price for such actions, as it apparently did in the latest congressional elections.

“The Oregon measure tells you these measures are not easy or simple,” AP quoted Muzaffar Chishti of the Migration Policy Institute as saying. “The political cost may be significant, even in blue states.”

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