

# **Oregon's Anti-Immigrant Movement**

## ***A resource from the Center for New Community***

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The recent wave of nativist ballot measures proposed in Oregon did not come out of nowhere. The statewide nativist group Oregonians for Immigration Reform (OFIR) has long been fostering relationships with state legislators and building a grassroots base, helping the national anti-immigrant movement gain a strong foothold in Oregon.

Reporters and outlets planning to cover OFIR and their latest efforts should provide important context, including:

- Evidence of OFIR's ideological extremism and fringe rhetoric
- OFIR's links to national organizations that have hate group designations
- OFIR's dependence on financial assistance from a notorious white nationalist

### **Who Is OFIR?**

OFIR is by far one of the strongest state contact groups of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the flagship national anti-immigrant organization. FAIR is considered a hate group because of its roots in white nationalism and eugenics and its current day virulent and false attacks on immigrants.

FAIR, and other anti-immigrant organizations connected to FAIR, have shown an increasing interest in using Oregon as a testing ground for state-wide anti-immigrant policies because of Oregon's low barrier to qualify a ballot measure. This, coupled with OFIR's strong relationships and coordination with legislators and grassroots activists, creates a unique situation for the anti-immigrant movement to advance far-right nativist measures in a conventional blue state.

Nativist victories in Oregon can be used to build momentum for the anti-immigrant movement around the country. For instance, politicians and nativist leaders used the 2014 failure of Measure 88, which would have allowed undocumented Oregon residents to obtain driver licenses, to support legislation in Georgia that would block access to driver licenses to anyone with DACA or DAPA.

Justifying his support for the overall goal of the Georgia legislation, Senator Isakson (R-GA) [argued](#), "All you have to look at is what happened in Oregon last week in the election."

“Oregon voted 2-to-1 not to give drivers licenses to illegal aliens. I think that’s the sentiment of the American people,” he continued.

Leading anti-immigrant spokesperson and executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies Mark Krikorian [expanded](#) on the same talking point.

“Whenever the public gets that sort of clear-cut, black-and-white issue for tougher controls—even in Oregon, when they’re legalizing dope, they support them. It really highlights how this issue is not a Republic-liberal issue like, say, taxes and abortion, but an up-and-down issue, elites versus the public.”

OFIR and its allies are looking to make Oregon, and the United States, a more hostile place for immigrants going forward. Strident OFIR ally and Oregon State Sen. Kim Thatcher, for one, has added her name to an amicus brief challenging President Obama’s executive actions granting deportation relief to some immigrants while reform legislation languishes in Congress.

OFIR and its allies are also increasingly courting national figures within the anti-immigrant movement. Recent occurrences include organizing or co-hosting events with former Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer and the notoriously anti-immigrant sheriff Joe Arpaio from Maricopa County, Arizona.

In 2016, OFIR sought to qualify three additional anti-immigrant ballot measures in Oregon to build on their 2014 success. These proposals promoted mainstay nativist policies, such as mandating that Oregon employers use a flawed federal program to check employee eligibility, making English Oregon’s official language, and increasing voter suppression through unnecessary proof-of-citizenship requirements. OFIR did not gather enough signatures to qualify the measures, but this does not represent the end of its anti-immigrant advocacy.

OFIR allies have already filed two nativist ballot proposals for the 2018 election: One proposal would repeal so-called sanctuary policies in Oregon, and another would cancel all voter registrations within two years if individuals did not prove their citizenship. These proposals pose a real risk to all Oregonians, and Oregon communities should be prepared for a more aggressive effort to qualify them for the midterm election.

## How to Describe OFIR

- Oregonians for Immigration Reform is an extremist anti-immigrant group that has orchestrated attacks on immigrants in the legislature and at the ballot box, and uses anti-immigrant fear mongering to achieve its goals.
- Oregonians for Immigration Reform has close ties to the national Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a widely recognized hate group founded by a white nationalist.
- Oregonians for Immigration Reform uses ugly, racist arguments to foster fear of immigrants and advocate for an Oregon that excludes so many in our community: people of color, newcomers, those who speak other languages, and more.
- OFIR's leaders unapologetically attend and speak at white nationalist events and publish writings on racist, extremist websites.
- OFIR is an extremist organization, but its impact has been mainstream—and therefore deeply troubling. OFIR has fostered productive, close relationships with legislators, with one state legislator even serving as a member of its board, and it has significantly shaped the public conversation about immigration in Oregon.

## OFIR's National Connections to Hate

### Links to national anti-immigrant organizations, including the hate group FAIR

- OFIR was officially founded in 2001 by Jim Ludwick, Frank Brehm, and Elizabeth Van Staaveren. Cynthia Kendoll is OFIR's current president.
- OFIR's original presence online, from 1998 to 2001, was maintained by Frank Brehm and [hosted](#) on the notorious white nationalist website New Nation News. On that site, OFIR promoted links to extremist outlets including The John Birch Society and New Nation News. Brehm's original site also promoted white nationalist publications like Middle American News and The Social Contract, as well as the virulently anti-Semitic newspaper *Spotlight*.
  - When approached about this by the [Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights](#), OFIR co-founder Frank Brehm responded saying he “had been given a free platform at the time, on a platform called NewNation.org,” and “If any organization, offers me an opportunity to write upon the subject of the need for reduced immigration, I am glad to discourse on the subject.”
- OFIR has been listed as the official state contact group in Oregon for the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a recognized anti-immigrant hate group.[1] In its newsletter, FAIR has described OFIR as “a group that works closely with FAIR.”

- According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, FAIR is a “discredited and extremist anti-immigrant hate group that espouses principles of white supremacy and eugenics.”
- OFIR’s work is just one example of anti-immigrant advocacy at the state level, much of which has been supported by FAIR. For instance, FAIR worked with and contributed tens of thousands of dollars to Protect Arizona Now's efforts to pass the anti-immigrant Proposition 200 in 2004. The successful referendum campaign eventually inspired additional, more extreme anti-immigrant policies including SB 1070.
- In [October 2016](#) and [March 2015](#), OFIR president Cynthia Kendoll travelled to the U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico borders, respectively, to participate in tours organized by the nativist Center for Immigration Studies. Kendoll also attended the [February 2012](#) iteration of the event.
- In [September 2014](#), Cynthia Kendoll and Oregon State Rep. Sal Esquivel traveled to El Paso, Texas, to attend the Federation for American Immigration Reform’s “Border Summit” with sheriffs and other anti-immigrant activists across the country. Kendoll also attended the [September 2012](#) iteration of the event.
- In [April 2013](#), Cynthia Kendoll travelled to Washington, DC to attend “Hold Their Feet to the Fire,” an annual citizen lobbying and media event organized by the Federation for American Immigration Reform.
- In August 2016 OFIR held a meeting featuring noted anti-immigrant and anti-refugee activist Paul Nachman. Nachman is a founding member of anti-immigrant group Montanans for Immigration Law Enforcement, which, like OFIR, FAIR has listed as a state contact group. Nachman also sits on FAIR’s advisory board and has worked with local chapters of anti-Muslim group ACT for America, whipping up anti-Muslim and anti-refugee sentiment in his home state of Montana. He is also a regular contributor to the white nationalist website VDARE.com

#### **Evidence of OFIR’s ideological extremism and fringe rhetoric**

- On October 12, 2014, Kendoll was a featured speaker at The Social Contract Press annual Writers’ Workshop event in Washington, DC ([video](#)). The Social Contract Press is a white nationalist publishing house founded and operated by John Tanton. Its quarterly journal, *The Social Contract*, regularly features writing by white nationalists.
  - A transcript of Kendoll’s presentation was [re-published](#) on the virulently anti-immigrant and anti-Black VDARE.com with a note from VDARE founder and white nationalist Peter Brimelow stating that he “was very impressed” with Kendoll’s presentation.
  - Kendoll again attended the Writers’ Workshop in October 2015.

- In July 2013, Kendoll wrote in [an op-ed for Oregon's Statesman Journal](#) that driver cards would "invite the contempt" of citizens in Oregon, in her call for signatures for the Protect Oregon Drivers Licenses (PODL) campaign to force a referendum vote on SB 833. Kendoll argued that "driver cards enable illegal immigrants to compete for" jobs that would otherwise go to Oregonians.
- Richard F. LaMountain, former OFIR Vice President and a chief petitioner for the 2014 ballot measure, has [contributed](#) to several nativist and white nationalist publications including Middle American News and VDARE.com. The virulently anti-Semitic American Free Press has also published [letters to the editor](#) authored by LaMountain.
- On [December 6, 2014](#), OFIR organized a meeting and celebration following the Measure 88 referendum results. The featured speaker at that event was Stephen Steinlight, Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for Immigration Studies. Steinlight has a history of making bigoted remarks. Earlier in 2014, Steinlight garnered [headlines](#) for make the following remark about President Obama: "We all know, if there ever was a president that deserved to be impeached, it's this guy. Alright? I mean, I wouldn't stop. I would think being hung, drawn, and quartered is probably too good for him."
- OFIR president Cynthia Kendoll illustrated the true nativist motivations behind the group's efforts when she described immigration as "an organized assault on our culture" to [Willamette Week](#).

#### **OFIR has repeatedly made false and misleading claims about immigrants**

- In August 2014, [Politifact debunked](#) OFIR claims that former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber "formed a group to create SB 833 'behind closed doors without allowing any input from citizens who represent the public interest.'" According to Politifact, this claim was "mostly false."
- In June 2013, [Politifact found that OFIR used inflated FAIR statistics](#) to suggest that "illegal aliens" cost Oregonians \$1 billion a year. According to Politifact, "OFIR did not itself calculate the costs, but relies on a December 2012 report by the Federation for American Immigration Reform" to make claims that undocumented immigrants would cost Oregon taxpayers \$1 billion a year. This claim was found to be inflated and rated "mostly false."
- An Oregon trade group that advocated for driver cards for immigrants disputed OFIR's claims that cards are "de facto immigration reform." In an [October 21, 2014 article](#) by the *Statesman Journal*, reporter Carol McAlice Currie noted that the Oregon Winegrowers Association, the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the Oregon Catholic Conference and the Episcopal Bishop of Oregon were among some of the leading supporters of SB 833. Executive director of the Oregon Association of

Nurseries disputed OFIR's claims that driver cards for immigrants were "de facto immigration reform," explaining that the bill would "make Oregon a safer place."

### **OFIR depends on financial assistance from a notorious white nationalist**

- In recent years, OFIR has received significant funding from white nationalist and eugenicist [John Tanton's](#) philanthropic foundation, U.S. Inc.:
  - \$15,000 matching grant in 2015 ([source](#))[2]
  - \$20,000 in 2014 ([source](#))
  - \$8,600 in 2013 ([source](#))
- Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the anti-immigrant hate group founded by Tanton in 1979, also [contributed \\$3,500](#) to OFIR's Measure 88 campaign committee, Protect Oregon Driver Licenses.

## **OFIR's Mobilization of State Legislators**

OFIR has mobilized an active and powerful group of state legislators to push their anti-immigrant agenda forward. In fact, every single state legislator who has sponsored an anti-immigrant ballot measure has strong ties to OFIR or the national anti-immigrant movement.

Since joining the Oregon state legislature in 2004, **State Sen. Kim Thatcher** has become the state's leading proponent of anti-immigrant legislation, including a failed imitation of Arizona's notorious SB 1070. Thatcher is a co-founding member of State Legislators for Legal Immigration ([SLLI](#)), a nationwide coalition of nativist state-level lawmakers with extensive connections to the organized anti-immigrant movement and, in particular, its flagship organization the Federation for American Immigration Reform ([FAIR](#)). Thatcher was also one of 26 state lawmakers that signed SLLI's May 2015 [amicus brief](#) in *Texas v. U.S.*, the states' lawsuit challenging DACA/DAPA.

OFIR has regularly endorsed Thatcher's candidacy since at least 2006, and Thatcher has appeared at public events sponsored by OFIR. For instance, at a March 2006 event at the state capitol organized by KPAM's Victoria Taft and OFIR, Thatcher addressed the crowd and claimed, "Oregon has given cover to too many people wreaking havoc on our society." (Statesman Journal, March 25, 2006)

In another example of her extremism, Thatcher claimed she was fine with letting Portland "self-destruct" through its governance during a radio interview in 2015. "Rueben I'm afraid you're going to sound a little more intelligent on these details than I am because I haven't really been paying that close of attention to Portland. Because I'm fine with letting them self destruct," Thatcher said. (30:25 mark, [Students for a Better Future Radio, March 3, 2015](#))

OFIR is not the only extremist group with which Thatcher has associated: at a spring 2015 rally in Salem, Thatcher appeared alongside two Patriot movement leaders. One of them was Mike Vanderboegh, a Three Percenters' cofounder who threatened "civil war" at the rally. Rep. Mike Nearman also appeared at the event. (Source: [Political Research Associates](#))

**Rep. Sal Esquivel** was elected to the Oregon legislature in 2004, and has similarly gained regular endorsements from OFIR. He sponsored the proposed 2018 ballot measure that would eliminate so-called sanctuary policies in Oregon. Esquivel similarly worked with OFIR on Measure 88 and led legislative efforts to repeal licenses in the legislature with Thatcher. Esquivel also has strong connections to the national anti-immigrant movement. He [attended](#) FAIR's 2014 Border Summit in El Paso, Texas with OFIR President Cynthia Kendoll. He was also a featured speaker at the July 2010 National Immigration Policy Summit in Phoenix, Arizona. This [event](#) was sponsored by anti-immigrant groups including FAIR and NumbersUSA.

**Rep. Mike Nearman** was elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 2014. Prior to his election, in 2013, Nearman was [elected](#) to OFIR's board as a "member at large." He remains on the group's board today. Nearman regularly appeared at OFIR's events during his 2014 campaign and was an active [volunteer](#) for the Protect Oregon Driver Licenses committee. With Esquivel, Nearman recently sponsored the proposed 2018 ballot measure that would eliminate so-called sanctuary policies in Oregon. He also sponsored the proposed 2018 ballot measure (with James Buchal, a right wing attorney and activist who has worked closely with OFIR leaders) that would suppress voting rights in Oregon. Along with Kim Thatcher, Nearman also appeared with Patriot movement leaders at a spring 2015 rally in Salem, Oregon.

**Rep. Greg Barreto** was also elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 2014. As a candidate, Barreto and his wife Chris [assisted](#) OFIR and their No on Measure 88 campaign. In June 2015, Barreto served as the MC of a rally in Salem featuring virulently anti-immigrant Sheriff Joe Arpaio. Barreto hosted a [dinner](#) for Arpaio and others, including OFIR President Cynthia Kendoll, at his home after the rally.

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[1] OFIR was listed as FAIR's state contact group in Oregon through March of 2016, after which FAIR removed the names of all state contact groups from its website. [Here is an archived list.](#)

[2] Although OFIR originally named U.S. Inc. as the source of this matching grant on its website, the language has now been updated to omit the information. Contact CNC for a copy of the original language.