

Oregon interfaith leaders declare win in gun control vote

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Mark Knutson, right, chief petitioner of a gun initiative, speaks at a rally, joined by Rabbi Michael Cahana, center, outside the Oregon state Capitol on July 8, before signatures are delivered to elections officials to get the proposal on the ballot. (AP Photo/Andrew Selsky,File)

For Mark Knutson, securing the necessary signatures this summer to get one of the country's strictest gun control measures on the Oregon midterm ballot was an accomplishment on its own. Now, he and other proponents are declaring it a historic victory.

“We are celebrating a victory for our children and youth and high school students,” said Knutson, a chief petitioner of the gun safety initiative and senior pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church in Portland.

[Election results](#) so far show Measure 114 leading by a narrow margin of 51 percent to 49 percent. [The Oregonian declared](#) the passage of the measure on November 9. The Associated Press has yet to call it.

Senior Rabbi Michael Z. Cahana, a chief petitioner of the gun safety initiative, is attributing the win to volunteers “who held on to hope against fear.”

“Our role as interfaith leaders was to inspire that belief that we can stand together and change the world for the better,” said Cahana, of Congregation Beth Israel in northwest Portland.

Knutson and Cahana are leaders of Lift Every Voice Oregon, an interfaith organization committed to reducing gun violence. Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, and Native American spiritual leaders are part of the network that made a pact to organize around gun reform in the wake of the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, that left 49 people dead.

The network officially formalized in 2018 after a gunman killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Lift Every Voice previously sought to get a gun control measure on the ballot, before the pandemic stymied its 2020 efforts. It also brought forth a pair of bills in 2019 that did not make it through the Oregon Legislature.

This time around, volunteers trained by Lift Every Voice began getting signatures for the ballot late last year. They did so at farmers markets, Pride events, and when Hamilton toured in Portland.

The organization saw a rush of new volunteers after mass shootings in May left 10 Black people dead at Tops Friendly Markets store in Buffalo, New York, and 19 students and two teachers dead at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

Measure 114 would ban the sale of magazines with a capacity greater than 10 rounds and would require permits and firearm safety courses to purchase any gun. Applicants would have to pay a fee, submit to fingerprinting, and pass a criminal background check.

The state police would create a firearms database and applicants would apply for the permit from the local police chief, county sheriff or their designees.

The National Rifle Association's Institute for Legislative Action denounced the initiative on its website, saying "these anti-gun citizens are coming after YOU, the law-abiding firearm owners of Oregon, and YOUR guns."

On November 7, Oregon's Elections Division said it will fine an NRA political committee more than \$8,000 for a delay in reporting a \$25,700 donation to the campaign opposing the gun control ballot proposal, [the Oregonian reported](#).

About 1 in 3 people in Oregon own guns, according to a [recent report](#) from the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center that also found residents of rural areas in the state are more likely to own a firearm than those living in urban areas (41 percent to 24 percent). Of those who own a firearm, more than 40 percent think gun laws should be more strict in Oregon, according to the report.

Knutson said he was humbled that "so many people would rise up across the state," including those in rural areas, to vote in favor of the measure.

On election night, Knutson found it inspiring to be at church as people monitored results on a big screen and as a young-adult choir sang music inside the sanctuary. "It was a sacred space to calm this nation," he said.

"I think the faith community, at our best, with music and the arts and the scriptures of our traditions . . . has something really powerful to offer in terms of healing and hope," Knutson said. "I was just struck in that moment." —Religion News Service