Kalamazoo gay-rights ordinance: Big spending predicted

By John Liberty
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KALAMAZOO -- Former Washington, D.C., gay-rights activist Jon Hoadley says he's come to Kalamazoo to "take the question of who someone loves off the table."

Gary Glenn, president of the American Family Association of Michigan, says Hoadley is a hired political gun who has the ability to raise a quarter-million dollars and deliver a cadre of national volunteers to help pass a Kalamazoo ordinance banning housing, employment and public-accommodation discrimination against homosexuals.

In any other odd-year November election, the big political story would be candidates running for the Kalamazoo City Commission. This Nov. 3, Kalamazoo's decision on providing specific discrimination protections to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender individuals is expected to top the ticket.

Observers predict it will mean big spending, big volunteer ranks, unusual political dynamics and involvement by state and national groups digging in on both sides of the gay-rights debate.

Two main groups in ordinance tussle

KALAMAZOO -- Campaign canvassing, information and fundraising have begun under the umbrellas of two major groups taking opposing views on Kalamazoo's so-called anti-discrimination ordinance.
Below is information about the two organizations -- One Kalamazoo, which supports passage of the ordinance, and Kalamazoo Citizens Voting No to Special Rights Discrimination, which opposes it.

**Kalamazoo Citizens Voting No to Special Rights Discrimination**
The group's Web site, [responsiblevoters.org](http://responsiblevoters.org), contains information and positions on the ballot question and notices of meetings and campaign events. Web site visitors can sign up to volunteer or donate to the campaign.

Contributions also are being solicited at the American Family Association of Michigan Web site, [afamichigan.org](http://afamichigan.org). Citizens Voting No has no public headquarters and does not list its leaders.

**One Kalamazoo**
One Kalamazoo officially opened a downtown office Thursday at 344 N. Rose St. The headquarters is open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays.
The group's Web site, [OneKalamazoo.com](http://OneKalamazoo.com), contains information about the group's positions, volunteer opportunities and fundraising. Its steering committee has 18 members, including political, religious, educational, public advocacy and business interests. The committee members are:

- Narda Beauchamp, president of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays of Southwest Michigan.
- Janice Brown, executive director of The Kalamazoo Promise Foundation and former Kalamazoo Public Schools superintendent.
- David Buskirk, chairman of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners.
- Toni Buskirk, citizen.
- Jan de la Torre, prevention specialist with the Community AIDS Resource and Education Services of Southwest Michigan.
- Nate Knappen, president of the Western Michigan University Student Association.
- Terry Kuseske, co-chairman of the Kalamazoo Alliance for Equality Action Committee, Kalamazoo City Planning Commission chairman and a candidate for the Kalamazoo City Commission.
- The Rev. Matthew Laney, of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ.
- Marty Marlett, lead facilitator with Transcend.
- Jon McNaughton, ordained Methodist minister.
- Dave Pawlowski, chairman of the Kalamazoo County Democratic Party.
- Danielle Streed-Redmond, attorney.
Hoadley is a South Dakota native who graduated from Michigan State University in 2006 with a degree in social relations. He recently ended his two-year tenure as executive director of National Stonewall Democrats to become campaign manager for One Kalamazoo, a political committee formed here to push for the ordinance's passage. National Stonewall Democrats is a Washington-based political lobby that advances lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues and supports election of "pro-equality Democrats."

Hoadley said he was hired by One Kalamazoo's steering committee. Ordinance opponents, including Glenn, say Hoadley's decision to leave a permanent post in Washington, D.C., to head a three-month ordinance-advocacy effort in Kalamazoo signals two things: a well-funded campaign with possible ties to Kalamazoo political donor Jon Stryker and a larger gay-rights political agenda.

Hoadley dismisses both assertions but declines to discuss any "individual contributors," including Stryker, a wealthy Kalamazoo philanthropist known for his gay-rights advocacy through his Arcus Foundation. Stryker has been courted by One Kalamazoo, Hoadley acknowledged. "The truth is, we want as many donors as possible," Hoadley said. "We've talked with him, and we'd appreciate his support. But we don't talk about individual donations."

Debra Reed, a spokeswoman for Stryker, declined to comment.

**Campaign spending**

Hoadley said One Kalamazoo's spending will depend upon the campaign investment expected by conservative ordinance opponents, including the American Family Association of Michigan.

Glenn predicts the war of the war chests will be no contest, citing one national gay-rights publication that quotes Hoadley suggesting that Kalamazoo's pro-ordinance campaign budget could top $200,000 and attract gay-rights volunteers from across the country.
"Hoadley confirmed that other national organizations would be assisting the One Kalamazoo campaign with staffing, volunteers and financial assistance but wouldn't comment on any certain plans," said an Aug. 3 story announcing the creation of One Kalamazoo and posted online by The Bilerico Project, a gay-issues media site.

"Our side will be lucky to raise and spend $30,000 to $40,000," Glenn said. "We'll do whatever we can to help the people running this in Kalamazoo and provide the experience we've had with what's worked in other communities. But we know we're not going to be able to compete with Jon Stryker." Hoadley won't comment on the $200,000 estimate.

"We're figuring out what it's going to take to win in Kalamazoo, and I don't know what that number ultimately is going to be," Hoadley said. "We'll raise the money that we need."

All organizations raising and spending money on the ordinance campaign will have to disclose their contributions and expenses. Michigan campaign-finance laws require that transactions occurring through Oct. 18 must be reported by Oct. 23. A final accounting is due Dec. 3.

** Protections challenged  
The November vote will resolve whether Kalamazoo should have an ordinance that makes it a city infraction to discriminate in housing, employment or access to public accommodations based on a person's sexual identity or gender identification.

Put simply, employers, landlords and public places could not deny things like jobs, apartments or restaurant service to people because they are homosexual or because they were born one gender and present themselves as another.

Neither state nor federal laws currently include gender identity or sexual orientation protections, although legislation has been introduced. Under the proposed ordinance, alleged violations that occur inside the city would be reported to the city manager's office for investigation. Violators could be fined $500 for each occurrence.

"There's a set of laws already that say you can't discriminate based on issues like race, sex and marital status because decisions should be based on who can do the best job," Hoadley said. "Those things are off the table, and gay and transgender people believe who someone loves should also be off the table."
Opponents, including the local Kalamazoo Citizens Voting No to Special Rights Discrimination, disagree.

That group's Web site says the proposed ordinance amounts to "reverse discrimination," attempts to "legislate acceptance ... of homosexual conduct," is "legally ambiguous" and could result in violating "privacy rights of women and children" in matters such as restroom and locker-room use. The Kalamazoo Gazette was unable to reach Charles Ybema, a spokesman for the group.

Hoadley said ordinance backers believe Kalamazoo's decision to exempt religious organizations from complying with the measure is a fair accommodation. The provision was added so institutions such as churches and parochial schools with beliefs that homosexuality violates their tenets are not forced to choose between faith and the law. Individuals with religious objections would still be required to comply, however, and Citizens Voting No calls the religious exemption "way too narrow."

City voters have been decidedly liberal on gay-rights matters in recent years.

In 2001, voters upheld a decision by the City Commission to offer health-care benefits to municipal employees' same-sex partners. In 2004, Kalamazoo voters bucked a statewide vote that passed a constitutional amendment to define Michigan marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Statewide, the so-called marriage amendment passed by 59 percent to 41 percent. But results in the city of Kalamazoo were nearly the reverse. Here, 42 percent of voters favored the one-man, one-woman marriage definition, and 58 percent opposed it.