

Oregon holds the records for the most statewide initiatives (there were 318 between 1904 and 2000), the highest average initiative use (6.6 per general election), and the most statewide initiatives on the ballot in a single year - 27 in 1912.

Historians identify one man as the driving force behind I&R: William Simon U'Ren" known as early as 1898 as "Referendum U'Ren" for his single-minded devotion to the cause. U'Ren was born on 10 January 1859 in Lancaster, Wisconsin, the son of a blacksmith who, with his wife, had emigrated from Cornwall in England. Young U'Ren accompanied his family westward to Nebraska, then to Colorado, learning the blacksmith's trade from his father. In 1885, at age 26, he earned a law degree in Denver, and then moved to Iowa, Hawaii, and California before settling in Milwaukie, Oregon, in 1889. By this time he had been a miner, a newspaper editor, and a Republican Party worker, in addition to practicing law.

In 1892 he was forced to give up his law practice as a result of an asthma attack and, having no family in the area, was nursed back to health by the Lewellings, a local family of fruit growers. The Lewellings were also reformers, "good government being to us what religion is to most people," wrote the lady of the house. Albert Lewelling brought U'Ren a copy of James W. Sullivan's book, *Direct Legislation*, and U'Ren, at age 33, found his life's work. As he later told an interviewer: "Blacksmithing was my trade and it has always given color to my view of things. I wanted to fix the evils in the conditions of life. I couldn't. There were no tools. We had tools to do almost anything with in the blacksmith shop; wonderful tools. So in other trades, arts and professions ... in everything but government. "In government, the common trade of all men and the basis of social life, men worked still with old tools, with old laws, with institutions and charters which hindered progress more than they helped it. Men suffered from this. There were enough lawyers: many of our ablest men were lawyers. Why didn't some of them invent legislative implements to help people govern themselves: Why had we no tool makers for democracy?"

U'Ren, with the financial support of the Lewellings, took it upon himself to forge the tools of democracy: initiative, referendum, and recall. He brought together representatives of the state Farmer's Alliance and labor unions to form the Oregon Direct Legislation League, of which he was named secretary.

In 1894 U'Ren was elected chairman of the state's Populist Party convention, and won approval of an I&R platform plank. That same year the League published a pamphlet explaining I&R and distributed it throughout the state: 50,000 copies in English and 15,000 in German.

In 1896 U'Ren won a seat in the state's lower house and in 1897 worked the legislature - without success - to gain approval for I&R. Warned that he might go to purgatory for his wheeling and dealing, U'Ren replied thunderously: "I'd go to hell for the people of Oregon!"

Following the 1897 defeat, U'Ren reorganized the League to broaden the base of I&R support. In addition to farmers and labor unionists, the new 17-member executive committee included bankers, the president of the state bar association (such attorneys' associations were notorious during the Progressive era for opposing I&R), and Portland Oregonian editor Harvey W. Scott.

U'Ren ran for the state senate in 1898 and lost, but nevertheless won passage of his I&R amendment the following year. Under Oregon's constitution, amendments had to be approved by two successive sessions of the legislature. In 1901 I&R passed with a single dissenting vote, and a year later voters ratified it by an eleven to one margin.

U'Ren joined other reformers in sponsoring dozens of initiatives during the next two decades. In 1906, he was among the sponsors of an initiative to ban free railroad passes, which the railroads routinely handed out as gifts to politicians and which he himself had once received. In 1908, he proposed initiatives to make Oregon the first state with popular election of U.S. senators and to reform election laws. Both passed by overwhelming margins. In 1910, Oregonians passed an initiative to establish the first presidential primary election system in the nation. The margin was small (43,353 to 41,624), but two dozen other states copied it within six years.

The closeness of the 1910 vote showed that the voters were not quite as ready for reform as was U'Ren, and they rejected his 1912 initiative proposing a unicameral legislature by a greater than two to one margin.

Other early initiatives that bear the mark of U'Ren were a 1906 constitutional amendment extending I&R powers to local jurisdictions, approved by three to one, and a 1908 amendment that gave voters power to recall elected officials.

And these were just the beginning, for U'Ren associated himself with many more initiative efforts before his death, at age 90, in Portland on March 5, 1949. In Oregon, I&R had worked just as its early advocates said it would: this one reform opened the door to all the others.

As a Progressive reformer and practitioner of initiative and referendum campaigns, U'Ren had no equal in any state. Lest he get all the credit for establishing I&R in Oregon, however, another man must be mentioned as the state's number two I&R advocate: Max Burgholzer of Buxton (near Eugene), Oregon, who some contemporaries claimed deserved equal credit.

Oregon is one of two states (the other is Arizona) where women gained the right to vote by an initiative. But it lost on the first try in 1906, and lost again by an even bigger margin in 1908. In 1910 suffragists tried a different approach: an initiative giving only female taxpayers the right to vote, a compromise that was rejected by about the same margin as the 1908 suffrage amendment. Finally, in 1912, suffragists led by Abigail Scott Duniway won their long struggle: their measure passed by a margin of 61,265 in favor to 57,104 against.

Leading the fight against women's suffrage were the liquor and saloon interests, which (rightly, in this instance) feared women would vote for Prohibition. In 1914, the first year Oregon women voted, a Prohibition initiative passed by a wide margin. Women also provided the slim 157-vote victory margin (out of over 200,000 votes cast) for a 1914 initiative constitutional amendment abolishing the death penalty in Oregon. In 1912 a similar initiative had failed, 41,951 to 64,578.

Labor unions won approval of a 1912 initiative establishing an eight-hour day for workers on public works projects, and two other measures prohibiting private employers from hiring convicts from state or local jails.

Some of the most innovative Oregon initiatives of the early days were those that failed to pass. One was a 1914 full-employment initiative sponsored by the Socialist Party. The proposal would have set up a job creation fund derived from an inheritance tax on estates worth more than \$50,000 (a huge fortune in those days); the state labor commissioner would then have had the duty to employ any citizen demanding work in a "Department of Industry and Public Works." The measure failed 57,859 to 126,201.

In 1930, another unique proposal - a state constitutional amendment to ban cigarettes - was put on the ballot by citizen petition. By a three to one margin, Oregonians rejected the idea. They did, however, approve an initiative amendment that year establishing a procedure to set up independent, locally owned "People's Utility Districts" to market water and power. In 1938, Oregonians approved the "Townsend Plan" old-age pension initiative. The idea was the brainchild of Dr. Francis E. Townsend of Long Beach, California, who proposed making monthly payments to senior citizens if they promised to spend their entire allotment each month and thus stimulate the economy. Also on the ballot that year was an initiative to clean up the Willamette River, which was heavily polluted by pulp and paper mills and sewage. The measure had been passed by the legislature in 1937 but vetoed by Governor Charles Martin. Voters passed the initiative by a wide margin.

In the late 1940s a University of Oregon at Eugene student, Clay Myers, a leader of the campus Young Republicans, began a movement for reapportionment of the state's legislative and congressional districts, whose boundaries had not been redrawn for over 50 years. Rebuffed by the legislature, Myers sponsored an initiative constitutional amendment specifying that if the legislature failed to reapportion the state during its first six-month session after the census data were released every ten years, the secretary of state would reapportion it. Voters approved the initiative by a nearly two to one margin in 1952. Myers went on to reapportion the state himself during his 1967-1977 term as secretary of state.

In the 1960s, Oregonians put only seven initiatives on the state ballot in five elections, far below their average. In 1960, scenery-conscious citizens sponsored an initiative to limit billboards through the state, but the electorate rejected it by a nearly two to one margin. In the 1970s, however, leading the national trend, initiative use rebounded, with 17

qualifying for the ballot. Among those approved was a "denturism" initiative (1978) that broke dentists' monopoly by allowing denture technicians to sell and fit dentures at a lower cost. Ron Wyden, a young lobbyist for senior citizens, championed this initiative. Dentists opposed the measure with a saturation advertising campaign that voters found so obnoxious that they approved the initiative by a seven to two margin. Voter interest ran so high that the number of ballots cast on the "denturism" question was only a tenth of a percent less than the number cast for gubernatorial candidates. For Wyden, the initiative was a starting point for his successful 1980 campaign to win election to Congress.

None of this could have occurred had it not been for the work of William Simon U'Ren. U'Ren is perhaps the only person to be honored by a monument commemorating his initiative work. The monument can be found in front of the Clackamas County Courthouse, on Main Street in Oregon City. The bronze plaque reads; "In honor of William Simon U'Ren, author of Oregon's constitutional provisions for initiative, referendum, and recall, giving the people control of law making and lawmakers and known in his lifetime as father of Oregon's enlightened system of government."

In the 1990s saw the rise of an initiative proponent by the name of Bill Sizemore. Sizemore became known as Mr. Initiative. He drew the ire of the progressives (liberals) because all of the initiatives he sponsored (literally dozens) were all aimed at them – tax cuts, paycheck protection, labor reform and term limits. His success rate at the ballot box wasn't stellar, but his impact on the initiative scene is indisputable.

Unfortunately, his success has also led to a backlash against the initiative process. His opponents, primarily labor unions, have sponsored initiatives themselves to try and make the initiative process more difficult – with limited success. However, they were successful in getting the state legislature to place on the ballot a constitutional amendment that would have drastically increased the number of signatures required for a constitutional amendment. It was defeated handily. But undeterred by this defeat, the labor unions were eventually successful in placing an initiative on the 2002 ballot that would ban paying signature gatherers by the signature. It was adopted by the voters but a court challenge was being planned.

This state history is based on research found in David Schmidt's book, *Citizen Lawmakers: The Ballot Initiative Revolution*. See <http://iandrinstitute.org/Oregon.htm>