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## Publisher Pushes One Issue Above All Others: Abortion

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OCT. 17, 2005 | 12 AM



TIMES STAFF WRITER

James E. Holman makes his living in the world of alternative newspapers. For 33 years, his irreverent and wildly successful weekly, the San Diego Reader, has needled the city's captains of commerce, government and society.

But Holman has also pursued a passion unusual among his brethren in the left-leaning alternative press: a quiet crusade against abortion.

This year, the strict Catholic from Coronado is tapping his sizable fortune to advance a November ballot measure that would make it harder for girls to terminate pregnancies in California. Proposition 73 would require doctors to notify a minor's parents at least 48 hours before performing an abortion. Teenagers facing a medical emergency, or obtaining permission from a judge, would be exempt.

Records show that Holman, 59, is by far the leading contributor to the cause, providing more than \$1.1 million of the nearly \$1.8 million reported by backers so far. His contributions have included loans, cash and nonmonetary donations, with much of the money used to pay for the gathering of signatures needed to qualify the measure for a vote.

"He's very passionate about the issue," said friend and fellow Proposition 73 supporter Albin Rhomberg, "and very committed to making this effort a success."

Holman did not return telephone calls from The Times. A campaign spokesman said he would not be granting interviews.

A father of seven, Holman has been described in some accounts as a recluse and ultraconservative ideologue. Friends say that portrait is off the mark.

Rather, they say, the lean, graying-at-the-temples publisher is a cerebral man who tilts libertarian but is defined mostly by his deep religious beliefs. He attends Mass daily and counts priests among his close friends. He once took an extended leave from his newspaper to work with a missionary group on Los Angeles' skid row.

Despite his substantial wealth, Holman takes the bus to work, eats sack lunches and lives modestly -- an anti-consumerist lifestyle his friends attribute to his faith. In addition to the Reader, he publishes four lay Catholic papers -- in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Tijuana -- that routinely skewer bishops and others who stray from the official teachings of the church in Rome. The papers also reflect the Catholic doctrine that homosexual acts are sinful.

"Jim is devoutly Catholic, and everything he does is informed by his faith," said Bob McPhail, editor of La Cruz de California, Holman's Tijuana-based paper. McPhail said Holman is legendary among nuns and priests in Tijuana -- where he once lived in a spartan apartment in the city's red-light district -- for his financial support of church schools, homes for unwed mothers and programs for the poor.

Abortion has long been one of the publisher's overriding concerns, stemming, friends say, from his belief in the sanctity of life. Holman has been to jail for protesting outside abortion clinics, and has given money to politicians who share his views.

In years past, supporters of abortion rights picketed his office because of articles in the Reader and Holman's refusal to accept ads offering abortion services. One cover story was particularly controversial. It was headlined "What Becomes of San Diego County's 20,000 Fetuses Each Year," and, unlike most stories in the paper, was based on an idea of Holman's, he acknowledged in a 1989 interview with The Times.

In the same interview, Holman explained his ban on ads for abortion services -- a choice that distinguishes him from publishers of most other urban weeklies. "There are some things that are legal that I find so heinous, so horrible morally, that I wouldn't want to be an agent to it," he said.

He also declines to run same-sex personal ads. And though the Reader is full of scantily clad women promoting breast augmentation and bikini waxing, it does not carry the sexually explicit ads sometimes seen in other alternative papers.

Opponents of Proposition 73 say the publisher's personal beliefs prove that the measure's backers have an agenda beyond notifying parents about a minor's abortion. They say proponents -- stalled in their efforts to overturn Roe vs. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion 32 years ago -- are nibbling away at it by making access more difficult.

Holman's initiative would insert into the state Constitution language defining abortion as causing the death of "a child conceived but not yet born." The adoption of such language would lay the foundation for encroachment on reproductive rights, said Kathy Kneer, president of Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California, which is leading the fight to defeat the measure.

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"It concerns us that someone with such deep personal and religious views is able to enter the arena of public policy and essentially force those views on everyone else," said Kneer, whose organization offers family planning and abortion services.

Rhomberg says the initiative's goal is strictly to protect parents' rights, and that Holman, whose four daughters range in age from 9 to 18, "obviously has a real interest in this matter." He acknowledged, however, that "we believe a side benefit of this initiative is that it would reduce the number of abortions, and of course Mr. Holman would be happy about that."

Raised in the Los Angeles area, Holman attended Carleton College in Minnesota and served with the Navy in Vietnam. He was awarded the Purple Heart and, friends say, still experiences pain from shrapnel in his back.

He taught English in Colombia for a while, then briefly pursued graduate studies in philosophy at UC San Diego. In 1972, he founded the Reader in his Mission Beach apartment, building on his experience selling ads at a Chicago paper by the same name.

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Alex Farnsley, an early partner in the venture, said the early years were lean. He and Holman used pseudonyms for their articles and photographs "so it wouldn't look like it was the same people doing everything."

Initially about eight pages, the paper struggled for a long time. Farnsley had a falling-out with Holman and received a cash settlement after seven years of litigation, an ending he describes as "very sad."

Gradually, the Reader grew and became a coveted destination for San Diego writers. One former reporter, Paul Krueger, described Holman as generous with salaries, a gifted and inspiring editor and fearless when it came to printing hard-hitting stories. He also kept his views from influencing the journalism, Krueger said, with one exception: abortion.

"As my memory serves me, that was really the only taboo subject," said Krueger, who spent a dozen years at the Reader and now is a television news producer in San Diego. "If you had a story that made a pro-choice person or position look 'good,' it wasn't likely to get in the paper."

The Reader today is a glossy tabloid that runs an average of 220 pages each Thursday. Though critics say it has lost its reputation for tough but balanced investigative work, the Assn. of Alternative Newsweeklies describes it as the largest publication of its kind in the nation, with a circulation of more than 171,000.

Such success has provided Holman the money to bankroll Proposition 73. The measure is the fruition of years of effort by anti-abortion activists and others dismayed after the state Supreme Court blocked a parental consent law passed by the Legislature in 1987.

But Holman's role goes beyond check writer. He also has recruited other large donors -- including Domino's Pizza founder Tom Monaghan, an acquaintance and fellow Catholic from Michigan -- and has used his Catholic papers to rally support.

During the signature-gathering phase, the publications carried copies of the petitions that could be snipped out and circulated, Rhomberg said, as well as ads and articles that declared the initiative "the first pro-life measure to come before the public in California history."

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At Planned Parenthood in San Diego, President Mark Salo said Holman's low-profile but critical support for Proposition 73 does not surprise him. For years, as he entered the driveway at the agency, Salo would pass a lone abortion protester. The man never yelled or bothered anyone, but he did hold a sign bearing an enlarged color picture of a fetus.

"It was Jim Holman," Salo said, "just standing out there with his sign."

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