Florida became the focus of a right-wing campaign to end affirmative action in the spring of 1999. In March, Ward Connerly announced, “Florida is going to be a target for our national movement. I have concluded there is a problem in Florida.” Connerly, the wealthy African American businessman and foe of affirmative action and desegregation, had previously led campaigns that eliminated the consideration of race and gender in university admissions and state employment and contracting in California and Washington. His goal was to put a similar initiative on the Florida ballot for the 2000 election.

In California and Washington, conservative political leaders supported Connerly’s effort, as did the Center for Individual Rights, a Washington, DC, law firm that has provided legal representation for individuals claiming “reverse discrimination,” but in Florida, neither the law firm nor the Republican establishment supported him. Governor Jeb Bush saw Connerly’s initiative as “divisive,” and the state chairman of the Republican Party “followed his governor’s lead in keeping his distance from the initiative.” However, many Floridians apparently supported Connerly in 1999. Two autumn public opinion surveys found overwhelming support for his initiative among Florida’s white voters; the results of the second poll appeared in newspapers on November 8. Connerly and his organization, the American Civil