The 1986 Cleveland organization of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was one of the first to press for an anti-Forbes charter amendment that had seemingly run out of steam. By the end of September, the Forbes political machine had been weakened. But a vote in November on a ballot issue that would limit a city council's ability to enact zoning changes or contract services to individuals would have to be made without the support of the usual sources of campaign money. Forbes, who had been a dominating force in Cleveland politics for almost two decades, was now facing a challenge.

On the local political scene, the Forbes machine was beginning to show signs of weakness. Forbes's son, Jack, had recently announced his intention to run for mayor of Cleveland, and Forbes himself was rumored to be considering a run for the same position. Forbes's political allies were beginning to distance themselves from the Forbes machine, and Forbes himself was beginning to show signs of strain.

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