

# Measure 4 backers to counter 'false ads'

By CATHERINE SIEGNER  
Of the Emerald

Supporters of Ballot Measure 4 are disgusted with their opponents' advertising tactics. W.C. Harris, Oregon Grangemaster,

said Monday in Eugene. Harris, Ken Fitzgerald, editor of the Farmer's Union and Grange newsletters and Dwyte Wilson, executive vice-president of the Oregon-Washington Farmer's Union appeared at a Harris Hall

press conference to discuss the measure.

Ballot Measure 4, placed on the November ballot by the Portland-based Public Power Coalition — of which all three are members — would amend state law to make people's utility districts (PUDs) easier to form.

PUDs are locally owned and controlled, and have an elected board of directors. Under the 1937 Bonneville Act, public bodies and cooperatives such as EWEB have first right to preference for federal hydropower. This power, generated at Columbia River dams, is the cheapest form of electricity.

The current law, termed "unworkable" by supporters of Measure 4, requires two petitions to be circulated and two elections to be passed before the fledgling utility may be operated.

Ballot Measure 4 would reduce the requirements to one petition and one election.

Opponents of the measure, who number chiefly private, investor-owned utilities, say it would cost too much for local residents to buy out existing utility systems and operate a new PUD. Billboards appearing recently in Portland read, "It will put you in debt without your consent—Vote No on 4."

At Monday's press conference, Harris had some strong words about these signs.

"This kind of advertising is deplorable," he said. "I believe Measure 4 couldn't be defeated if they (the opponents) told the truth about it. The only thing you can do about 'false advertising,' if you will, is to file a civil suit. We're having someone look at that possibility right now."

To counteract the anti-Measure campaign, the coalition intends to buy television and radio time and canvass neighborhoods to get its view across to the voters.

The measure's supporters expect to be outspent by the private utilities 10 - 1.

"They have admitted they will spend five times as much, but it's probably closer to 10 times," he said.

Fitzgerald criticized the measure's opponents for being hypocritical.

"Everything they charge us of doing with Measure 4 is exactly what they do," he said. "PP&L (Pacific Power & Light, - a private utility) just had an enormous stock sale. How many stockholders got to vote on that?"

Fitzgerald was referring to the charge made by opponents that Measure 4 would dip into property tax payers' wallets without their permission, an accusation the coalition vehemently denies.

"There is no basis for the charge that this measure gives the directors (of a PUD) a blank check," Harris said. "There are built-in safeguards to protect the people of a district."

Passage of Measure 4 could have far-reaching effects on Oregon's energy future. Historically, Oregon has established far fewer PUDs than other states, including Washington where 80 percent of residents are served by public utilities. Approximately 20 percent of Oregon's population receives power from the utilities, and the rest are served by private utilities.

A major argument surrounding Measure 4 concerns availability of Bonneville power at a cheap rate. Supporters of Measure 4 claim new PUDs would be able to receive such power and therefore provide service at a lower rate to customers than the private utilities, who not only must buy more expensive power, but must operate at a profit. PUDs are non-profit entities.

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