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Measures 51 and 18 cause friction between factions on nuclear issue

By Jolayne Houtz
Of the Emerald

Two measures that would abolish nuclear weapons production and the storage of radioactive waste in Lane County would be a first step toward stopping an arms race that has gotten out of control, supporters say.

But Concerned Citizens for Defense, a group formed to fight the passage of ballot measures 51 and 18, says if the measures passed, Lane County would become a defenseless target, and the area's safety would be jeopardized.

Ballot Measure 18 would ban the testing, maintenance, production or storage of nuclear weapons or wastes in Lane County and would establish a county nuclear-free zone. The measure, referred to voters by the Lane County Board of Commissioners, would take effect Dec. 4.

Ballot Measure 51, a city measure, would eliminate production of major component parts of nuclear weapons or their delivery or control systems. It also would ban military defense systems,

nuclear war planning, nuclear power production, disposal of nuclear wastes and transportation of nuclear weapon systems or wastes through Eugene. The measure allows certain nuclear research activities.

An elected three-person board also would be established to oversee compliance with the measure and to prescribe fines for violation of the measure.

"We are waging an inadvertent war through nuclear weapons," said Eva Edelman, a spokesperson for Political Action for Lasting Security, which put Ballot Measure 51 on the ballot through an initiative petition.

"We're not only threatening ourselves, we're threatening future generations," she said. "Do we as a community want to get involved with something that we will have to stop anyway if we are to survive?"

The measures would have only a minimal effect on jobs in Lane County and in Eugene, Edelman said, because only a few businesses in the area make nuclear weapons parts.

But Harry Hance, chairman of Concerned Citizens for Defense, said passage of the measures would send a clear message to producers thinking of locating in the county that the area isn't interested in jobs.

"At a time when Lane County needs work, we would be sending the wrong signals to businesses who might want to locate here," Hance said.

Many major companies that have defense contracts would no longer consider Eugene as a possible future home, he said.

"Even if you just make nails that are used in nuclear submarines, the measures would affect you," Hance said.

The measures also would leave the community open to attack with no way to defend itself, said Bill Coons, a member of Concerned Citizens for Defense.

"As long as the Russians have (nuclear weapons), we should, too, as a deterrent," Coons said.

If passed, the measures would leave a dangerous gap in national defense, said Keith Byrne, also a member of the group.

"It would be great if everyone adhered to a no-weapons policy, but the lessons of history are quite clear. We must

deal with the world as we find it," Byrne said.

Lane County would be seceding from the rest of nation by passing the measures, he added. Three nuclear-free zone measures passed by several communities in the United States recently were found to be unconstitutional, he said.

But Edelman said nine counties in Oregon already have nuclear-free zones, and 3,260 communities worldwide, including 18 nations, have established the zones. She added that a few states have found nuclear-free ordinances invalid because of old state laws but not unconstitutional.

"You are not supposed to comply with your government when they are violating the basic principles of humanity," she said. "If you don't disagree actively, you're condoning it."

Byrne, who called the measures "ridiculous... unconstitutional and dangerous to civil liberties," said creating an elected board to make sure people abide by the measures is like establishing a "big brother" organization.

The measures' wording could allow the board to censor the teaching of nuclear theories in schools or to ban the research of nuclear medicine, he said.

"I don't want to put my trust into the goodwill of the people elected (to the board)," Byrne said.

But Edelman said the measures do not ban research into nuclear medicine or the establishment of short-term holding areas for nuclear wastes. The measures also do not affect businesses that don't produce nuclear weapons but may deal with nuclear weapons producers.

"If you sell paper clips to GE or to Boeing, (the measures) aren't going to affect you," she said.

Accidents in either nuclear power production, such as the Chernobyl incident in the Soviet Union, or in the transportation of wastes, are one of the biggest problems associated with the nuclear issue, Edelman said.

An accident involving radioactive wastes occurred about once every 15 days in the United States between 1973 and 1978, according to Edelman.

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