

Nuclear-free zone ballot shunned Eugene mayors opposed

By Hon Walker
Emerald Associate Editor

Three decades' worth of Eugene mayors voiced their unanimous opposition to a proposed strengthening of the city's nuclear-free zone ordinance during a press conference at City Hall Wednesday.

"Diversity is good when we can live in harmony together," said Mayor Jeff Miller. "The tragedy is when we say we want our political stand or philosophical stand to be the supreme law of the land."

Miller joined four former city mayors in supporting the newly-formed Citizens Against an Irresponsible Nuclear-Free Zone, a political action committee made up of local residents and business leaders.

At issue is a proposed amendment to the city council

in Aspen to the attempt to ban nuclear-related industries from the area.

"What Aspen was doing was sending the wrong message, and in effect that's what I think this charter amendment would do," he said. "The idea of a nuclear-free zone is an idea whose time has passed."

He said the Feb. 15 decision by the aerospace manufacturer Rohr Industries not to locate in Eugene has polarized the groups in favor of and against a further restrictive measure.

"I think what we are after is diversity and not divisiveness," Anderson said.

Gus Keller, mayor from 1977 to 1984, said, "Eugeneans sometimes overstep left or right, and the net result is that we defeat our own purpose."

He opposed the more restrictive measure because of the

"Those that advocate a viable, strong community unfortunately are losing the battle," Obie said. However, he added, he expected that voters would reject the upcoming proposal.

Mayor Miller said he agreed with the intent of the existing ordinance, but opposed a measure that would be more "radical," he said.

"We need an ordinance that says we are for world peace, which is what we have," he said. "We don't need an elitist ordinance that is wrong for this community."

Rohr Industries, Miller said, was interested in locating in Eugene but was reluctant to locate here because of the nuclear-free zone ordinance. He said other industries could do the same.

"We're talking about businesses that don't want to operate in a climate of uncertainty," he said.

Steve Johnson, chief petitioner for the Committee to Keep Eugene Nuclear-Free, said industries such as Rohr probably would not have been kept out of the city under the existing ordinance, nor under the proposed stricter form.

The proposed measure would ban the production of nuclear weapons and parts for nuclear weapons delivery systems, as well as prohibit food irradiation and civil defense drills within city limits, Johnson said.

In addition, he said, an elected board would be formed to enforce administrative rules of the ordinance.

"I think the people in the community have made it quite clear that we don't want nuclear-related industries here," he said.

Mike Schwartz, co-chair of Citizens Against an Irresponsible Nuclear-Free Zone, called the proposed measure an extreme one that would "destroy our hope for a better city and a better future for our citizens."

He said the existing measure was serving its purpose and would be best left alone.

'Eugeneans sometimes overstep left or right, and the net result is that we defeat our own purpose.'

— Gus Keller

charter, to be presented to voters in May. The amendment would strengthen the city's existing nuclear-free zone ordinance.

Edwin Cone, who was mayor from 1958 to 1968, spoke about the years he watched the success of timber preservationists. Since that time, he said, thousands of jobs have been lost.

"To prevent economic stagnation from occurring in Eugene we need more industries" to offset employment lost in the timber industry, Cone said. "I urge a no vote on this nuclear-free zone ballot measure."

Cone's successor, Lester Anderson, was mayor until 1976. He is now an Aspen, Colo. resident.

He likened the recent unsuccessful attempt to ban fur sales

message it would send to future potential businesses, he said.

"It appears to me that this particular charter amendment would put Eugene on the cutting edge of being anti-growth and anti-opportunity," Obie said.

Eugene's existing nuclear-free zone measure took effect while Brian Obie was mayor. Obie said he has urged the city council to repeal the ordinance, even though it was "one that Rohr could have lived with." He said the proposed measure could cost the city many future jobs.

"I'm very disappointed that the views of those who would advocate no growth would be so extreme that they would be selfish to those in need of work," he said.

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