

Gang of Nein

Do progressives say no to everything?

It's only been a few weeks since city government took a progressive turn in the May elections, but the alarmist predictions have already begun. In a letter to *The Register-Guard* on Friday, May 28, Steve Hawke warned that the left-leaning council majority will nix proposals for economic development: "The liberal group will chase away any prospective businesses," claimed Hawke.



Hawke predicted an exodus of businesses across the river. "Any business that saw the election results knows that Springfield is now its new ZIP code." (When you're bawling out progressives, you have to give Springfield its props as the model of no-nonsense government. Springfield hasn't been this hot since the premier of *The Simpsons*.)

Hawke's letter harkened back to the tirades of the "Gang of 9." This conservative group, which formed in 2001, published political cartoons that excoriated progressive councilors. Who can forget the image of Mayor Torrey pushing a boulder labeled "economic prosperity" up a hillside, while progressive city councilors pushed the other direction? Or the cartoon featuring the "no-growth enforcement unit" – clad in trench coats and dark glasses – forcing children out of a ramshackle treehouse labeled "Eugene Chamber of Commerce"? Or the cartoon portraying city councilors as pirates attacking boats labeled "jobs" and "corporations"?

My favorite cartoon by the Gang of Nine showed a trembling child in his bed, too scared to sleep. Under the bed were devilish-looking city councilors, one bearing an ax and another carrying a chainsaw. As the boys' parents left the room, his mother reassured him. "Oh Honey! It was just a bad dream! Ain't no City Council hiding under the bed waiting to kill our economy with non-development!"

The authors of these cartoons weren't great wordsmiths, and their caricatures were pretty sophomoric, but the Gang of 9 achieved great success. The Gang helped to elect a more conservative council in 2002, including one of the Gang's own members, Jennifer Solomon.

Now the pendulum is swinging again. After years in the minority, the progressives may be able to muster a majority on some issues. Those who have lambasted progressives in the past are worried. To quote Bugs Bunny, "It ain't so funny when the rabbit has the gun."

The conservatives' alarm is unwarranted. I think the next few years will show that the critics of progressives have mischaracterized them unfairly. The progressive group doesn't oppose every proposal for economic development. To the contrary, the progressives have advanced several proposals that would foster the growth of our local economy.

Consider the economic plan that Mayor-elect Kitty Piercy circulated in April 2004. This plan calls for greater attention to Eugene's economic infrastructure, from airport services to telecommunications to train service to auto and alternative transportation systems. Piercy's plan includes an initiative to nurture sustainable businesses in Eugene. With careful use of enterprise zones, Piercy's plan would seek to revitalize the urban core. Redevelopment of brownfields would be a high priority.

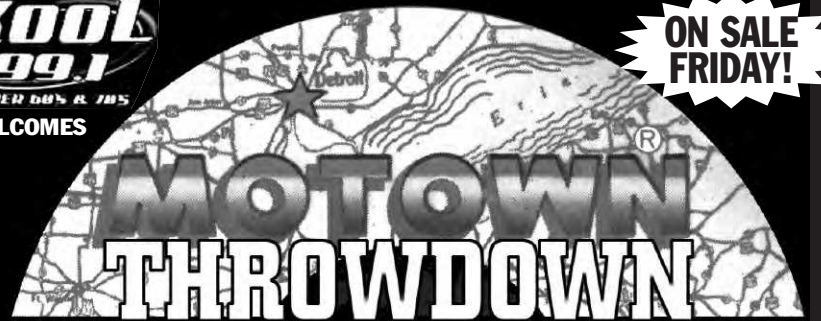
Piercy is also committed to streamlining the permit process and working to improve Eugene's business climate. I guess that means that the city will mothball its pirate ships.

Hopefully the acrimony will subside. Eugene doesn't need a Gang of 9 or a Gang of Nein. The only group of nine that we need is a City Council working harmoniously with our new mayor.

Tom Lininger is a law professor and former Lane County commissioner.

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THE TEMPTATIONS



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