

“Little Old Moraga” Sends “Political Message” on Global Warming

First Political Statement Ever on a National or International Issue

By Steve Angelides

The Town Council of “little old Moraga” has sent a political message to the rest of the world on the issue of global warming. By a vote of 3 to 2, with Mayor Mike Metcalf and Councilmember Rochelle Bird dissenting, the council adopted a resolution endorsing the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement.

The deciding vote was cast by Councilmember Dave Trotter, who said he voted for the resolution because he thought it was “important to send the political message, even from little old Moraga.” Trotter made his decision after a spirited debate between the proponents, led by Councilmember Linda Deschambault, and the dissenters, led by Metcalf.

Deschambault works for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and heads a local non-profit organization called Generation Green. Metcalf is a Stanford-educated engineer who is retired from Chevron.

Metcalf said afterwards that this was the first time in the Town’s history since it was incorporated in 1974 that the Council has taken a position on any national or international issue. “The reason we haven’t is it’s always been the belief of the Council that we should be focusing on our own affairs and we have enough on our plate,” Metcalf explained.

The resolution urges the federal and state governments to take action to reduce global warming pollution, including asking Congress to pass “cap and trade” greenhouse gas reduction legislation. Cap and trade legislation includes a combination of emissions limits and a market-based system of tradable allowances among emitting industries.

The Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement which includes binding greenhouse gas limits, went into effect on February 16, 2005. It has been ratified by 141 countries, many of which have already enacted cap and trade legislation.

The political message which Moraga has endorsed seems to be aimed at least in part at the Bush administration, which has refused to adopt the Kyoto Protocol, and until recently had questioned the role of human activity in global warming. California made history when Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed cap and trade legislation on September 27, 2006.

When she presented the proposal to the Council, Deschambault noted that in Contra Costa County similar action has already been taken by the county, and by the cities of El Cerrito, Richmond, Lafayette, Pleasant Hill, and Walnut Creek. Deschambault told the Council the issue of global warming is now “mainstream.”

In addition to endorsing the U.S. Mayor’s agreement, the Council also voted, with Metcalf abstaining, to join the organization ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, USA, Inc. During the debate Metcalf challenged the assertion in the ICLEI resolution that the burning of fossil fuels “accounts for more than 80% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.” Although the Council majority amended the ICLEI resolution to change the 80% to “a substantial portion,” that was not enough to gain Metcalf’s support for the Town joining ICLEI.

ICLEI, headquartered in Oakland, has over 660 local government members around the world, according to its website. The ICLEI resolution calls for Moraga to establish a local greenhouse gas reduction target and adopt an action plan to meet that target.

Deschambault explained that ICLEI will provide software and other resources to help the Town develop its plan. Town Manager Phil Vince said the only money he will propose in the Town’s forthcoming budget for this issue will be the \$600 annual ICLEI membership fee. Vince said he hopes students from St. Mary’s College will volunteer to help the Town develop its plan.

The global warming issue was placed on the Council’s agenda at the request of a local environmental organization called Sustainable Moraga. According to the group’s president, Moraga resident Bill Durkin, the organization has been active since 2005, and adopted bylaws and established a bank account in January of this year.

Durkin said the group now has an active core group of about a dozen members and a mailing list of 100. The group’s historic success in garnering the Town’s action on global warming comes on the heels of an energy fair it organized at the Moraga Shopping Center with 15 vendors on May 5, and a battery recycling program it initiated which won accolades from the Town Council last year.

Many members of Sustainable Moraga spoke in favor of the Council’s actions on global warming, but only Metcalf and Bird spoke in opposition. “Although everyone in the room may have been in favor,” Metcalf said, “if anyone thinks that’s everyone in the Town, they’re wrong.”

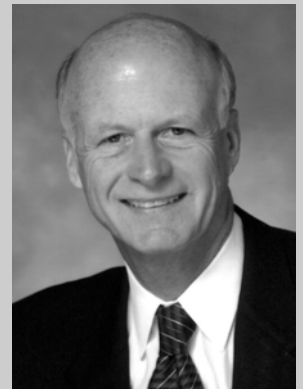


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