



# Are they running the city or running amok?

*City Council* *3-9-07*

## S.C. council's various resolutions draw praise, criticism

Santa Cruz Mayor Emily Reilly says the council's decisions give the community a chance to be heard nationally.

Dan Coyro/  
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**SANTA CRUZ** — From declaring Santa Cruz a "pro-choice city" to seeking the impeachment of President Bush, city leaders have a long track record of tackling global issues — and of being criticized for it.

Santa Cruz leaders say they are proud of their stances despite those who say the City Council should focus on fixing potholes instead of ending violence in Darfur, denouncing the Patriot Act or calling for the

ouster of former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Though new Councilwoman Lynn Robinson has made it clear she's against resolutions that have nothing to do with city business, other council members said they don't plan to stop wading into world affairs. Last week, the council was busy making three national statements at one meeting.

"What better way for local people to have their voices heard," Mayor Emily Reilly said. "There's never

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been any indication we're speaking for everyone in town, but I think we are speaking for the majority in this community."

City leaders have been drafting globally minded resolutions for decades, including the 1996 establishment of Santa Cruz as a "nuclear-free zone" and welcoming Nicaragua to trade with Santa Cruz when the United States considered an embargo in the 1980s.

And for decades, the value of these resolutions has been a subject of debate. Some doubt the effectiveness of such resolutions, saying they are ignored by national leaders. Some say national and international resolutions are simply a waste of council time.

Councilman Mike Rotkin, the author of many resolutions, has said taking these positions costs the city nothing more than the price of a stamp. He says little council time is spent discussing them.

Most resolutions pass with little discussion, but some, like last week's two-hour debate about whether to take a pre-emptive stand against U.S. military action in Iran, take more time.

Nearly every resolution requires a letter written by city staff be sent to numerous elected leaders, often including the president.

"Some national and international issues have such pressing impacts that it's hard for us to ignore them," Rotkin said. "I think it's important to give our federal leaders a sense of what the local people feel."

Rotkin says he only writes resolutions if asked by a significant number of local residents and if the issue has a connection to Santa Cruz. In regard to Iraq, billions of taxpayer dollars have been spent to wage war, and young people from Santa Cruz have been deployed there.

In 2002, Santa Cruz was the first city in the country to condemn the war in Iraq. In 2003, after sending a

letter to the House Judiciary Committee asking for the impeachment of President Bush, Santa Cruz had a starring role on "The Daily Show" on Comedy Central. The city was lampooned by the show for attempting to influence national policy.

The resolution to avoid military action in Iran and withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq was pushed by more than 40 local peace activists who wrote e-mails or asked the council to take a formal stand against what's happening in the Middle East. It passed Feb. 27.

"I am so pleased that our city is considering a resolution calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces in Iraq and which opposes the use of U.S. military force in Iran," Darwin Street resident Monica Larenas wrote to the council. "I'm proud that we can once again be a city that is willing to push for sensible federal policies."

However, residents like Lu Haussler view the resolutions as counterproductive, something outside the council's authority.

"Stop wasting time on national topics, and instead apply your energy to the job we elected you to do," Haussler wrote. "Run our poor, neglected city."

Robinson, who in December voted against supporting a Hawaiian army officer who refused orders to deploy to Iraq, said she often hears praise from constituents for steering clear of national issues.

"I consider my job on the City Council to help run the city, so I'm really keeping my focus there as much as possible," she said. "It's not about being opposed to what the other points of view are. I really want to be focused on the nuts and bolts of helping the city function."

Political experts say resolutions do little to change policy, but can often be the beginning of a national movement.

"Resolutions are symbolic but still important," San Jose State political science professor Larry Gerston said. "I don't think these things are just empty statements. They're a way for people to express concerns to elected offi-

## Resolutions passed within past year

- Support of single-payer health care coverage.
- Opposition to proposed hike in immigration fees.
- Declaring Santa Cruz a pro-choice city.
- Support for Army Lt. Ehren Watada, who refused orders to deploy to Iraq.
- Opposition to violence and genocide in Darfur.
- Call for impeaching President George W. Bush.
- Support protecting California's national forests.

SOURCE: Sentinel files

cial in other offices."

Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, said every opinion counts and city resolutions help him understand where voters stand on issues.

"I can't do my job unless I hear from my constituents," Farr wrote in a statement. "I've found that municipal resolutions can be useful as a broad indicator of local opinion on a specific issue. I welcome all communications from constituents."

Supporters believe resolutions say more about the culture of Santa Cruz than expectations of change.

"I don't think our resolutions have any impact on George Bush, literally zero," Rotkin said.

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