

Council throws Santa Cruz into national abortion debate

Abortion
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SANTA CRUZ — City leaders officially declared Santa Cruz a “pro-choice city” Tuesday night, once again showing they’re not afraid to weigh in on divisive, national matters.

The “overwhelming majority” of Santa Cruz supports a woman’s right to choose, council members said as they passed the

resolution on a 5-2 vote. It authorizes the city to join the Pro-Choice City Campaign, a national network of cities dedicated to advocating for reproductive health choices and access to services.

“It’s an issue that needs to be dealt with and we need to speak on,” Councilman Ryan Coonerty said. “I’d be happy if the council didn’t have to take these positions, but the right to choose is being challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court, and it’s a politi-

cized issue.”

Council members Lynn Robinson and Ed Porter voted against the resolution.

The resolution didn’t come without several emotional pleas for the city to stay out of the debate.

One man told the council there was “a hole in my soul” when he heard of plans to officially label Santa Cruz a pro-choice city.

Another, holding his infant son while

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speaking at the podium, said there are many people in the city who oppose abortion, and that the council should reconsider its decision to wade into such a highly controversial issue.

Then, a homeless man brought up the Ten Commandments, specifically, “Thou shalt not kill.”

“Declaring Santa Cruz as a pro-choice

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city is a murder mentality,” said Gera Schmidt, who said she has lived in the area for 22 years. “We believe the unborn would ask the council, ‘Please don’t promote and encourage the Santa Cruz mommy’s womb to be a tomb.’”

People speaking against the resolution, some saying they support abortion rights, said it was a “very offensive” move by city officials.

A handful of people praised the council’s resolution and two women spoke openly about their personal experiences having abortions. A few people clapped when the resolution was passed.

“I’m a different person today

because I was able to make a choice 25 years ago,” Denise Wyld-bore said to the council in support of the pro-choice designation.

The effort was led by Councilwoman Cynthia Mathews, who helped found the local chapter of Planned Parenthood and had a 40-year career with the organization.

Council members defended their decision to take a stance in the pro-choice debate, one of the hottest issues in the country, as a way to protect the public’s “health and safety.”

The resolution comes on the heels of the 34th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision that made abortions legal.

“I don’t think there’s a question where the majority of residents in Santa Cruz lie on this issue,”

Councilman Mike Rotkin said. “We don’t make decisions on unanimity. We make decisions based on the majority.”

Robinson, who made it clear she is a strong abortion-rights advocate, said it was wrong for the council to put the resolution on its consent agenda — a list of routine business matters for the city to pass without debate or discussion.

“For me, it was the wrong direction. This is a polarizing item and the consent agenda was not the place for that discussion,” Robinson said. “When there’s so much city business to attend to, this is not what I want to be doing as a council member.”

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