

Board opposes rent initiative

By BUD O'BRIEN

Santa Cruz County supervisors voted today to oppose Prop. 10, the so-called "fair rent initiative" that will be on the June 3 election ballot.

Only Marilyn Liddicoat, the Aptos-Capitola supervisor, refused to support the recommendation of the county's Mobile Home Advisory Commission that the board express its opposition to Prop. 10. Mrs. Liddicoat abstained, but made it clear during debate on the issue that she looked favorably upon the initiative, which is generally supported by real estate, landlord and construction interests in the state.

The matter was brought to the board by the Mobile Home Advisory Commission because the passage of the initiative would kill the mobile home rental adjustment ordinance recently approved for the unincorporated areas of the county by the board. Under the terms of Prop. 10, no form of rent control could be adopted on a statewide level and could only be imposed on a local level by a vote of the people.

The supervisors, naturally, wasted little time in getting into political disputes over the philosophy involved in rent control. But another issue is what swung the majority of the board to vote finally to oppose the initiative. That issue might best be paraphrased as "truth in advertising."

While Supervisors Gary Patton and Chris Matthews are staunchly in favor of government intervention on behalf of tenants in the form of rent control and low-income housing provisions, the other three supervisors have consistently opposed rent control except in the case of mobile homes.

But a belief that the proponents of Prop. 10 have, to put it mildly, been guilty of misleading advertising in their effort to sell the initiative to the public as a measure that would protect the renter played a strong role in persuading Board Chairman Pat Liberty and Supervisor

Dan Forbus in finally voting to oppose the initiative.

Indeed, Mrs. Liberty, who had not taken part in the rather lengthy debate over the matter, said, as the time to vote on the matter arrived: "I agree in part with both sides of the argument, but I dislike dishonesty more than I dislike rent controls."

With that, she and Forbus — who had earlier indicated he wasn't going to take a position one way or the other — joined Patton and Matthews in voting to oppose the initiative.

Mrs. Liddicoat argued vainly that the board shouldn't take stands on statewide initiatives. She also got into an exchange or two with people in the audience who spoke on the matter. Two of those people, no doubt detecting the possibility of political advantage, are candidates for board seats in the June election. As Joe Cuchiarra, who is running for Mrs. Liberty's seat, and Robley Levy, who is a candidate for the seat that Mrs. Liddicoat is leaving, approached the microphone, Mrs. Liddicoat said:

"Here come the candidates . . . please keep to the issue."

Both Cuchiarra and Mrs. Levy spoke out strongly against Prop. 10 and urged the supervisors to take a stand one way or the other so their constituents would know how they stood. Mrs. Liddicoat tried to draw Mrs. Levy into a debate over the general subject of rent control, but Chairman Liberty put a stop to that brief exchange and the board went on to vote.

The board this morning also voted unanimously to drop a proposed ordinance regarding the posting of signs on land where pesticides had been applied. The board agreed with the assessment of Agriculture Commissioner John Simmen that federal and state ordinances were sufficient and that the proposed county ordinance would impose unnecessary burdens on farmers.

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