

Northern Exposure: Covering issues of Northern California

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A victory for the state of Jefferson

RED BLUFF For supporters of the breakaway state of Jefferson, [Tehama County](#) provided the only victory in a month of setbacks. Nearly 57 percent of voters here endorsed forming a 51st state.

Approval of the Tehama County ballot measure was offset by voters in nearby Del Norte County, who soundly defeated a similar measure in the June primary election.

In Siskiyou County, home of the secessionist movement, voters trounced a ballot measure that proposed renaming it the Republic of Jefferson. A few days later the Butte County Board of Supervisors told the secessionists to come back with more information – and did not set a date.

One of the most pointed rejections came in [Shasta County](#), where state of Jefferson supporters outnumbered their opposition 7 to 1 at a Board of Supervisors meeting. The supervisors rebuffed them, voting 4-1 to oppose joining the movement.

That leaves five [Northern California](#) counties officially supporting a 51st state, three rejecting it and a half-dozen that have taken no position.

Secessionists have not approached the [Plumas County](#) board, said Chairman Jon Kennedy. If they do, he will ask for specific information outlining the fiscal projections for managing a new state. “No one has penciled it out,” he said.

As for that green and yellow flag with two prominent black Xs? “It’s ugly!” said Kennedy. “A new state deserves something pretty.”

Environmental issues halt bypass work

WILLITS Tree-sitters couldn’t stop it. Protesters chained to backhoes couldn’t stop it. Even complaints by American Indian groups went unheeded.

Then the [Army Corps](#) of Engineers waded into the Willits Bypass fray. A single letter to Caltrans halted the \$200 million construction project on Highway 101 due to “ongoing and serious” noncompliance with the construction permit.

Most of the violations cited by the corps involve water and the environment, also the basis for opposition to the six-mile bypass. Caltrans has not compensated for the impact of the construction on wetlands or recorded an acceptable conservation easement, the corps’ June 20 letter said.

With construction on hiatus, runners with the American Indian Movement 500-Mile Spiritual Marathon arrived in Willits to join opposition that has included Redwood Nation Earth First and several local bands of Pomo Indians. They claim Caltrans willfully damaged American Indian artifacts while building a pipeline to compensate for wetlands destroyed by the bypass.

Caltrans spokesman Phil Frisbie Jr. acknowledged that equipment has been used in “potentially sensitive areas” but said no archaeological sites had been destroyed. The agency is working with the corps to resolve their differences before a July 15 deadline, when the corps could revoke the construction permit.

The new highway east of Willits is designed to reroute traffic from the congested downtown. The non-compliance delays could push completion into 2017, Frisbie said.

Sacred Buddhist texts draw concern

CAZADERO No one thinks the sacred Buddhist texts printed at the Ratna Ling Retreat Center are inflammatory. It’s the 40,000-square-foot book storage center and its 10-foot-high stacks of paper that have residents worried about fire.

The all-volunteer Timber Cove Fire Department, which protects the sparsely populated community scattered through the coastal hills of [Sonoma County](#), is not equipped to fight the intense heat of an industrial fire, said Carolyn Singer, a member of Coastal Hills Rural Preservation.

The group has mounted a prolonged opposition to Ratna Ling’s steady expansion since its 2004 move from Berkeley to the rural area. The retreat center, which includes the world’s

largest printing press for sacred Tibetan texts, has consistently misrepresented the extent of its commercial printing operations, Singer said.

No one from Ratna Ling responded to requests for comment.

So far county officials have sided with the Buddhists, including a recent Board of Supervisors 3-2 vote finalizing additional expansion. Supervisors Efren Carrillo, who represents the Cazadero area, said the center would be welcome and valued anywhere else in the world.

The two supervisors who voted against the project called it a poor land use precedent in an era of prolonged drought.

Singer emphasized that the issue is not religion but land use – and the 70,000 miles annually tallied by trucks transporting printing supplies in and books out on winding and poorly maintained county roads. “That just makes no sense,” she said.

Her group is considering legal action despite being out-financed in what she called a David vs. Goliath fight.

Jane Braxton Little, a freelance writer, covers science, natural resources and rural Northern California from Plumas County. Reach her at jblittle@dyeypress.com.