

# Hundreds demand new vote on water

By Tom Friesen  
Staff Writer

NIPOMO — Angry voters are sending an emphatic message to the Community Services District.

More than twice the required number of signatures were turned in Thursday on a referendum petition that will force the district board to accept the voters' Nov. 5 rejection of state water or call a new election.

"Nipomo has been an area inhabited by fiercely independent individuals with high thresholds of tolerance. But this issue has unified this community in a way I have never seen before," said area native Paul Luiz, who went door-to-door collecting signatures.

Luis said 80 percent of the registered district voters he contacted signed the referendum. "It didn't take a whole lot of arm twisting."

David Stroup, who spent 15 hours in front of the local post office collecting signatures, said quite a few people not only signed the referendum but also offered to help.

"It's not a state water issue. It's about voter rights," Stroup said, adding that he was "shocked" at the reasons people didn't vote on Nov.

It wasn't just a party.

"People have lost faith in this system, even veterans who have put their lives on the line," he said. The 472 people who signed the petition are saying "give us back our faith and trust in the power and justice of democracy."

The referendum required 220 signatures, which represents 10 percent of the district's registered voters, said Charles Gulyash who, along with Stroup and Luiz, spearheaded opposition to the board's reversal of a vote that had been heavily advertised as binding rather than advisory.

However, Gulyash did not help collect signatures because he lives outside the district boundaries.

"This is not a small group with an ax to grind," he said. The three men "didn't even know each other" before the board's action.

The officially certified result of the Nov. 5 election was 356-328 against the idea of tapping into the coastal branch of the State Water Project.

In summer, the district board unanimously adopted Ordinance



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In summer, the district board unanimously adopted Ordinance 91-62, which included a guarantee that the November vote would be binding on the district. On Dec. 18, the board adopted Ordinance 91-64, which removed that provision.

If the district board decides to call a new election, voters would be deciding whether or not Ordinance 91-64 should be overturned, restoring the clause in 91-62 which made the election binding.

County Clerk-Recorder Mitch Cooney was surprised at the number of signatures collected in Nipomo.

"They did very well," he said. "That's about 20 percent of the district's voters. That's a goodly number."

He explained the referendum process this



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By Mike F  
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# State water foes

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body takes an action that the people don't like, they can file a referendum before the action goes into effect."

Ordinance 91-64 would have gone into effect today.

A referendum is "the opposite side of an initiative," Cooney said. While an initiative seeks voter approval for a new issue, a referendum uses the vote to stop an action.

The referendum, with signatures of 10 percent of the district's voters, must be submitted to the clerk of the district within 30 days of the action being taken, he said.

The clerk of the NCSB board now has 30 days to verify the signatures and then another two weeks to present the referendum to the board of directors.

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"It didn't take a whole lot of arm twisting."

— Paul Luiz

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According to state law, the "legislative body shall reconsider the (91-64) ordinance," Cooney said. If the directors don't rescind it, they will have to call an election. "They cannot ignore it."

District General Manager Ryder Ray said Thursday that he doesn't know the specifics of the referendum except that it could overturn the board's decision to remove the binding provision from the original ordinance.

"That still doesn't do anything with the water," he said. "The board would still have to make a decision."

"When you're managing a water company, you look for any and all sources," he said. State water "is the only viable alternative. We've got to replace the groundwater source."

If the board of directors ultimately gets state water, he said,

"We probably would take around 2,000 acre-feet," which would provide the district's needs until 2005, not including groundwater.

On the other hand, if the issue goes to an election, the timing could create a real problem for the district board, which desperately wants state water.

It generally takes 90 days to prepare for an election. County water officials have said that June 3 is the deadline for the Board of Supervisors to decide if, or how much, state water will come to the county.

Cooney said his department will be sending out materials to be printed in March for the June 2 presidential primary. Officially certified results would not be available for another three weeks, which would be too late for the district to notify the county if the voters decide in favor of state water.

If the county's deadline for state water is moved back and the district directors decide on a special election, they will have to deal with an elections department that will be very busy in the usually slow summer months, Cooney said.

About 60 people are expected to take out election papers in July and August for the county's school board elections.

With the exception of Director Steven Small, district board members believe the Nov. 5 vote wasn't really representative of residents' wishes and that the importance of upholding the election pales in comparison to the need for state water.

The ball is now in their court, Gulyash said Thursday.

At a press conference called in conjunction with the referendum filing, he urged the board to rescind Ordinance 91-64 "before it is too late, before its fame with your names spreads across this country as an example of the brutal beating of a community's right to vote."

He said the board's action in passing the ordinance "will be picked up by national news, by writers of textbooks, and by users of metaphors across this land."

## County needs foster parents

SAN LUIS OBISPO — Currently there is a critical need for foster homes in San Luis Obispo County for children over 7 years (especially teens) and sibling groups.

On Feb. 4, at Sierra Vista Hospital Auditorium, 1010 Murray Ave. in San Luis Obispo, the Department of Social Services will host a Foster Parent Orientation Meeting. A sec-

home.

The meeting will also provide the opportunity to ask questions and speak with staff members and licensed foster parents.

Those interested in more information on attending the meeting may call 549-4100.

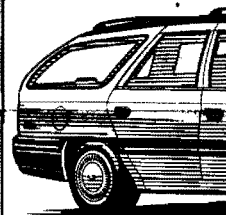
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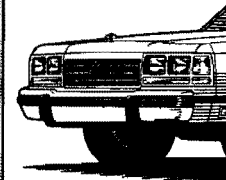
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