

TEENS' EARTH DAY REQUEST SPURS SUPERVISORS' DEBATE

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SAN ANDREAS - Two teenage girls Tuesday triggered an hour of debate on everything from climate change to economic sustainability when they asked Calaveras County supervisors to designate April 15-22 as Earth Week.

In the end, the designation passed by a 3-2 vote, with board Chairman Tom Tryon and Supervisor Gary Tofanelli opposed.

Tryon said that Earth Day, a holiday first observed in the United States in 1970, and events like Earth Week are "part of a well-organized political agenda."

Tryon also said he views sustainability as just another term for "economic stagnation."

"I don't want economic stagnation. I want economic growth," Tryon said.

Kati Giblin, 18, one of two Calaveras High School Earth Club members who appeared before the board, said she had only recently learned that "sustainability" was a controversial word in Calaveras County.

"We think sustainability is preserving the present quality of life," said Giblin, the club's president. Cierra Allen, 15, also an Earth Club member, stood beside Giblin at the podium during their presentation.

Giblin said that the Earth Club does not have any "particular political leaning." Many in the audience at Tuesday's board meeting disagreed, and soon the debate was raging.

Al Segalla, president of the Calaveras County Taxpayers Association, described Earth Day and efforts to promote sustainability as a "massive, highly financed movement" rooted in a United Nations effort to create a one-world government.

Sheila Russo of Paloma spoke against what she saw as the ominous connection between environmentalism and the U.N. She said she opposes "following an agenda by a world whose countries hate America as much as they do, but they take our money."

Peter Racz of the Gold Country Patriots said he believes that climate change - something mentioned in the Earth Week resolution - is a "fraud."

"I feel sorry for the kids, because they are misled," Racz said.

Many others, however, stood to say that they believe the world is facing natural resource limits and that the environment's ability to absorb pollution and other human-caused impacts is suffering.

"I have seen firsthand what capitalism is doing out there in the oceans and on the slope in Alaska," said Will Moore of Valley Springs. Moore said he formerly worked as a fisherman, logger and construction worker.

Catherine Lambie, executive director of the Blue Mountain Coalition for Youth and Families in West Point, noted that her organization is hosting the Earth Day celebration scheduled for Saturday in Angels Camp.

"We are not a socialist organization up in West Point," she said, responding to accusations from some who said they see environmentalism as a socialist plot.

Supervisor Darren Spellman asked to have the resolution on the agenda. Spellman formerly taught at Calaveras High, where he served as an adviser to the school's Earth Club.

"This resolution is not tied to any national or international organization," Spellman said.

He added that Earth Club efforts are addressing issues ranging from recycling valuable materials to providing seeds to help grow food for hungry families in Calaveras County. He said he sees sustainability as a practical, local problem and not a United Nations' conspiracy.

"There are some things that just need to be looked at with a broader perspective," Spellman said.

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