

# 'Proceed we will'

By Sally Morris The Trinity Journal | Posted: Wednesday, September 23, 2015 6:15 am

Although a split Trinity County Board of Supervisors last week declined to join the State of Jefferson movement aimed at withdrawing from California to form a 51st state, local Jefferson Declaration committee organizers vowed to continue their efforts with or without the board's involvement.

"We have gathered over 2,000 signatures which is enough to file a declaration with the California Secretary of State in support of withdrawal. We invite the board to join us and we are doing this so we have a seat at the table," said Richard Seel from the Trinity County Jefferson Declaration committee.

Spokesman for the State of Jefferson movement, Mark Baird of Yreka said the 2,000 number represents more than 50 percent of those in Trinity County who voted in the last gubernatorial election.

"All political power is inherent in the people, under the California Constitution, and we will file a declaration of and by the people of Trinity County supporting withdrawal. It gives the committee a voice and we invite this board to affirm the declaration that will give you standing as well. We would like that. However, proceed we will," Baird said.

He said the movement seeks to amend legislative representation in the state of California with a goal of equal representation in the Senate for every county and population-based representation in the lower house. It is expected to result in a court case and Baird said attorneys are being interviewed to support the Jefferson movement all the way to the Supreme Court if necessary.

"We are due to shake things up. Our economy is down and rural counties are being stifled. This is a plan to do something about it. We are not asking for any government intervention or participation. This declaration is the voice of the people. If you choose to amend the representation, we welcome your inclusion. We are asking for it, but this declaration will go forward with or without your vote as the direct will of the people of Trinity County. The people have spoken," Baird said, indicating petition signers only have to be citizens of the county, not registered voters.

He said committee organizers in Shasta County are getting close to attaining sufficient signatures where the goal is 26,000 to file a people's declaration on behalf of that county and that Humboldt and Mendocino counties will be targeted next to join the movement.

Since the current State of Jefferson movement began in 2013, six counties have adopted declarations to join. They include Siskiyou, Modoc, Glenn, Yuba and Sutter by a majority vote of their boards of supervisors and Tehama County by voter approval in June 2014. Lassen and Lake County supervisors have placed advisory measures on their 2016 ballots.

An advisory measure in Del Norte County failed in 2014 when 58 percent voted not to join the State of Jefferson. Some counties have opted out by not scheduling a vote and Trinity is the first to explicitly and definitively say "no", according to the Keep It California committee formed earlier this year to advocate

for better representation of rural California and oppose breaking away from the rest of the state.

Trinity County supervisors have received two presentations by State of Jefferson supporters in the past year and a competing presentation by Keep It California leaders challenging the financial claims and assumptions made by Jefferson proponents. They also received a detailed presentation from several county department heads regarding impacts to revenues and local services they predict in a State of Jefferson where one goal is to greatly reduce the number of state agencies and programs funded by taxpayers.

Keep It California's Vice Chairman Kevin Hendrick of Del Norte County thanked the Trinity County Board of Supervisors for its diligence in studying the potential ramifications and said, "I think you have enough information to know the State of Jefferson is not viable as proposed for Trinity County. It defies logic to think mustering all the poorest counties will end up with a proper new state."

Hendrick said everyone shares the concerns voiced on behalf of rural counties, "but complaining will not solve our problems. It takes hard work to propose actual solutions and we have started that work by reaching out to our urban neighbors to raise awareness of our rural issues. They don't hate us. Our intention is to build relationships so they understand our issues and think about how their proposals affect us."

While the State of Jefferson proponents sought the Trinity County Supervisors' support of a declaration to withdraw from the State of California, Hendrick asked the board to adopt a status quo "pro-California resolution and to help us advocate for specific solutions. We are stronger together."

The recommendation from County Administrative Officer Wendy Tyler was to take no action, noting county citizens have the opportunity to place a State of Jefferson measure on the ballot in the next general election.

Flag-waving State of Jefferson supporters packed the Board of Supervisors' meeting in Weaverville last week urging support of the cause, but there were also some opponents.

George Bates of Lewiston questioned the validity of the Jefferson declaration signatures, saying "it's not even voters. We're just given a number, but do they even live here? There's no way of verifying that if it's not registered voters."

Joseph Bower of Hayfork said more and better representation "sounds great, but the California Legislature is not going to let it happen so let's not go off on a wild goose chase. We need to work through existing channels to improve things. If we become the State of Jefferson with a bunch of other poor counties, it would be economic disaster and chaos. All the checks would stop coming and we'd be reduced to a state of anarchy before any sensible government would come to be."

Dennis Duncanwood of Lewiston called the Jefferson movement "the right spirit, but wrong direction. We have to find a different way of looking at the problem because all of rural America has the same issues of poor towns just getting bypassed and neglected."

A proponent of the State of Jefferson argued that Trinity County isn't poor and could be rich if it had

control over its wealth of resources including the timber, water and minerals depicted in the Trinity County seal.

Speakers who helped gather signatures in support of the Jefferson declaration said people here want Southern California to stop controlling Trinity County and they seek a new state with its own rules. One referred to the rural north as “the tail being wagged by the dog” and said “the water is being taken against your will and you don’t have any authority to stop it because you don’t have representation.”

Bill DeWolf of Trinity Center said opponents of the movement concentrate too much on the separation and not enough on the need for greater representation.

“People see California as a sinking ship and Jefferson State as a way to get off. It feels good on the Titanic, but it’s not sustainable,” said declaration committee organizer Rob Oakley of Hayfork. “Right now, I’m losing a customer a week to people moving out of state. There’s a mass exodus of people moving out of California to Oregon and Nevada.

“Pot is only a secondary issue. People don’t like the way this county is going. We beg. We are at the mercy of Sacramento. We hear overwhelming support for the idea of a State of Jefferson, maybe not so much to split, but to sit down and talk. We ask you to deliver this declaration with us to the state of California,” Oakley said.

Trinity supervisors were split 3-2 on three competing motions. Sups. Bill Burton and Keith Groves supported the State of Jefferson resolution supporting the withdrawal of Trinity County from the state of California. Sups. Karl Fisher, John Fenley and Judy Morris supported the Keep It California resolution declining to join the Jefferson movement while advocating for improved rural county representation.

Burton argued 2,000 signatures “is a lot, whether they are registered voters or not. The public is hugely interested in this and it’s our responsibility to answer that call.” He added the effort “is moving along no matter how we vote today. Two thousand signatures is a strong constituency and our little county will get recognition as we struggle to be heard and the big urban populations march off and vote.”

Sup. Keith Groves argued the timber, water and minerals depicted on the county’s seal “actually used to mean something, but we now live in a state that no longer believes in using resources. We work with the rural representatives and we’re thrown a bone here or there, but they haven’t turned the tide on California’s overregulation of northern counties. My district just lost 27 jobs in one company that was unable to stay in Lewiston due to California regulations. Our loss, Montana’s gain.”

He said he believes the State of Jefferson has little chance of happening, “but there is a small chance and a ray of hope. I’m asking the board to think outside the box. Will children 50 years from now be able to live and work here? Or just visit and say that’s where their grandparents used to be. I don’t want to leave California, but California has left me.”

On the other side, Sup. Karl Fisher said that after going through the exercise of looking at the financial implications, he believes the State of Jefferson plan would be a disaster for Trinity County where residents receive far greater services from the state than their contribution to the tax base could ever afford to pay for without aggressively raising their taxes.

Sup. John Fenley thanked the Jefferson proponents for taking a new path he called exciting, but said, “I request you let us suffer the path of working to improve our representation. Let us do our work instead of being divisive and tearing this county up.”

When it appeared there was not a majority of the board in support of the Jefferson declaration, Groves made a motion to take no action “rather than supporting the State of California status quo. I’d rather we not choose that option.”

“I agree that would be the easy thing to do, but voters didn’t send me here to do nothing,” Fisher said.

“By doing nothing, I think we’ll still have people in our face and I would like to get back to work. This is very divisive and I’d prefer we all work together and get back to it in Sacramento,” Fenley said.

Siding with Fisher and Fenley on the final 3-2 vote approving the Keep It California resolution, Sup. Judy Morris argued “the laws have really taken away our volume of voices, but we will continue to work with our representatives to address the issues presented to us. Our work continues regardless.”

Comment: Treebones posted at 8:03 am on Wed, Sep 23, 2015.

Irony alert! SOJers complain about lack of representation, yet decry their representatives at the County level where each Supervisor represents about 2700 residents. 1 representative per 2700 constituents apparently isn't good enough when you don't get your way.

It's never been about a lack of representation, it's always been about getting their way.

The elephant in the room is that the SOJers won't bring it before the voters of Trinity County.