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### **County puts off coal consideration**

#### **Despite removal of the item from the agenda, people tell commissioners what they think about the concept**

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More than 30 people packed a Lane County commissioners' meeting Wednesday to speak out on the prospect of a coal port proposed in Coos Bay, only to learn that the topic was being pulled from the county board's agenda.

Board of Commissioners Chairman Sid Leiken said he removed a discussion of the bulk cargo loading terminal and a possible board vote supporting it because the Port of Coos Bay told him the project isn't moving ahead as fast as expected. Leiken said it made little sense to debate a project that hasn't made it off the drawing board.

Elise Hamner, a spokeswoman for the Port of Coos Bay, said it's premature for the Board of Commissioners to consider supporting the project because it hasn't been determined whether the facility will be built. Three companies have an exclusive negotiating agreement with the port to pursue the project but have not yet decided whether they will try to build it.

"We asked them not to do a resolution because we don't have a project; we have a concept," Hamner said. "It's premature to be out there passing resolutions in relation to a project that's not a project."

The port expects a decision from the companies within the next two months. Commissioners plan to schedule a work session with the port and other interested parties to discuss the future of the rail line between Eugene and Coos Bay.

The board also may consider an alternative resolution to be drafted by Commissioner Rob Handy that would express the county's support for having the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conduct a wide-ranging environmental impact statement that would take a comprehensive look at the issues surrounding coal transport through the Northwest. A similar resolution has been approved in other communities along the rail route and is supported by Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber.

But the uncertainty over the Coos Bay facility didn't dissuade about two dozen people from staying to tell commissioners what they think about the idea of shipping coal from Wyoming and

Montana through the Pacific Northwest to be loaded on ships bound for Asia, where it would be burned in power plants. Under the Coos Bay concept, coal would come through Eugene and be transferred to a local rail line now owned by the port and carried to the new bulk cargo terminal under consideration in Coos Bay.

A few people spoke in favor of the new terminal and the jobs it would bring, but the large majority were firmly opposed. They said having two 130-car coal trains traveling through the county each day and then returning would have far-ranging effects on people's health, the economy and global climate.

The comments echoed those heard recently when the same topic was before the Eugene City Council and have been repeated at public meetings throughout the Northwest as several ports consider coal-export projects. Coal exports have won support from some labor unions and business groups but are roundly condemned by environmentalists, public health groups and science groups.

Opponents stressed the potential health damage from the dust that would blow off of open coal cars as they passed through the region. In addition to particulates that would affect air quality and hurt people with respiratory problems, they said coal contains toxic chemicals and metals such as mercury and lead that also would be released into the environment.

Pam Driscoll of Dexter noted that the last remaining coal-fired power plant in the Northwest, in Washington, is being shut down. She said it doesn't make sense to sell other countries a fuel that's being condemned for the pollution it causes here.

"Why would we shut down coal-fired plants only to ship the coal overseas to continue to poison our air," she asked. "We can do better than that, can't we?"

Others questioned the argument that the terminal would bring much-needed jobs to both Lane and Coos counties at a time when unemployment remains high. Opponents said those jobs would come at such a high cost in terms of damage to health and the environment they would cost communities far more than they bring in.

Cynthia Kokis of Eugene said she spent seven years in the Appalachian Mountains coal country and said generations of coal mining did not raise the region out of poverty.

"I have seen the heritage of what happened there. We have rust-colored rivers, we have flattened mountains, we have people suffering from black lung in the houses my children played in. We have poverty," she said. "Peabody Coal did not bring health or wealth to the people of Appalachia, and it has left them with a terrible heritage."

Two youngsters, brothers Sage and Cameron Fox of Eugene, also delivered strong criticisms of the coal port idea. They said it would be bad for children in this country and in Asia and that for all children to have a future, the world should stop burning coal to create electricity.

"Coal is dirty from start to finish and we should not be supporting it," Sage Fox said. "The last thing we need is two of these dirty coal trains passing through here daily."

The project has its supporters, however. Statehouse candidate Mark Callahan of Eugene said the jobs the terminal and trains would bring are badly needed and that opponents are using “exaggerated claims and outright lies” about the potential harm of coal trains to sway the board against the terminal. He called the concept of manmade global warming a hoax.

“The opposition’s supposed facts are not meant to inform but to scare and create a false premise meant to hide their true intention of limiting the use of fossil fuels,” he said.

“I and thousands of others in our county are asking and urging this board not to fall prey to the lies and exaggeration of the anti-coal crowd here this morning and reject the same fear mongering and anti-job and anti-economic behavior that existed 20 years ago with the spotted owl issue,” Callahan concluded.

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