

# Mendocino Measure Y

## Bring the Troops Home Now!

*I like to believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than are governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of the way and let them have it.*

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*

by Catherine Hart

Local political activism is emerging as one of the prime avenues of influencing national and international politics, including US policy in Iraq. Frustrated with the US House and Senate, which this month both backed the president's handling of the war and rejected a timetable for troop withdrawal, citizens are organizing to put democratic pressure on municipal governments to represent the will of the people. Cities for Peace ([www.citiesforpeace.org](http://www.citiesforpeace.org)) is a national organization that is tracking such local Iraq war advisories and seeking to organize a political bloc strong enough to bring about an end to the occupation immediately.

Mendocino Parents for Peace in Mendocino County, California, is an example of a group, which has successfully placed an advisory measure on the November 2006 county ballot. The measure reads: "Measure Y. Iraq War Advisory-Mendocino County (Advisory Measure—Majority Approval Required). Should the United States end the military occupation of Iraq and bring the troops home now? Yes or No?"

As the Cities for Peace website points out, hundreds of cities and towns, as well as counties, universities, and labor unions have initiated and passed referendums on the war, and an Iraq war advisory must be adapted for each individual case. The general steps are to: (1) create a coalition, (2) survey the positions of the city or county council, (3) gather signatures showing broad citizen support, (4) hold public education events, (5) get the measure on the ballot, and (6) do media outreach up to and following the election.

According to Mendocino Measure Y organizer Cal Winslow, "We found that California law says a citizen's advisory measure cannot be petitioned directly—an elected body must sponsor it. We decided to approach the County Board of Supervisors to get the measure placed on the county ballot. Three out of five supervisors were sympathetic, but they wanted to see that we had wide support. We were interested in an educational approach that would make the issue of the war more visible locally, so we used the petition signing campaign to help call attention to the war. Though we are a rural county with low population, we were successful in getting over two thousand signatures,

plus a list of about one hundred individual and group sponsors, which we presented in July at a Board of Supervisors meeting."

Proponents of the measure were surprised that, despite the support, the board almost did not put it on the ballot, indicating how unpredictable the political process can be. As Cal Winslow commented, "One would think that county government would have to put such a measure on the ballot when thousands of citizens ask for it."

Faith Simon, another Measure Y organizer, pointed out that, "We've accomplished a lot so far. Measure Y will be on the ballot. We had a well-attended community meeting with Medea Benjamin to help inspire us, and we had the largest contingent of any group in the local parades this summer." At a recent showing of musician Michael Franti's film *I Know I'm Not Alone*, Simon appealed to the packed house to give their money and time to assist the ongoing effort "Time is of the essence—in addition to the horrible loss of American and Iraqi lives, many young children in our community have been living their entire lives with this war and all that goes with it—a war that has now gone on longer than World War II." The group's brochure notes Mendocino County has already spent more than \$76 million on the war in Iraq, money that is sorely needed here at home.

Local peace activist Lorna Dennis pointed out, "If a majority of voters in Mendocino County answer yes, then we have practiced democracy. If the majority answers no, we have practiced democracy. Isn't it time we have an opportunity to go to the voting booth to express our opinion on this world issue? A chance to make Mendocino County a voice in the debate is one tool toward helping those who are needlessly suffering as a result of this war."

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### Links to Resources

- [www.declarationofpeace.org](http://www.declarationofpeace.org)—500 peace and justice groups pledge immediate actions demanding a shift from funding for war to meeting human needs.
- [www.votersforpeace.us](http://www.votersforpeace.us)—sign the Voter's Pledge: "I will not vote for or support any candidate for Congress or President who does not make a speedy end to the war in Iraq, and preventing any future war of aggression, a public position in his or her campaign."
- [www.voteyesony.org](http://www.voteyesony.org) The website for Measure Y in Mendocino County, California.