

How mayor's global view plays in land of the GOP

By MARJORIE MURRAY

IRVINE, Calif. — The local newspaper here, the *Irvine World News*, was graced with its global title by executives of Irvine Co. who wanted to communicate the "new world of Irvine" to Southern Californians settling this Orange County frontier in 1972.

It does not print international news.

But the paper couldn't be better named from the perspective of Larry Agran, this city's mayor. The 44-year-old, Harvard-educated chief executive has set a global agenda for this Southern California town of 100,000 people.

Mr. Agran is one of a new breed of city leaders — from Dennis Zane of Santa Monica, Calif., to Andrew Young of Atlanta — who believe that mayors must generate foreign policy from within the council chambers if their cities and the planet are to survive.

Mr. Agran's liberal — some would say radical — program has moved another local paper, the *Orange County Register*, to say he's a blend of Daniel Ortega and Boss Tweed.

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But Mr. Agran believes the times call for radical action. He wants mayors across the country to tackle national policies that are draining federal dollars from city housing, transportation, education, and health-care programs.

Specifically, he wants a meltdown of the defense budget. In 1987 his resolution to redress the imbalance between military and domestic spending was passed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Agran's leadership sparks some powerful tension in this city that has twice as many registered Republicans as Democrats, and a county that gave birth to Richard Nixon.

In a case in point, last month the Irvine City Council voted to ban all ozone-depleting compounds from the city.

"The compounds pose a global environmental emergency," Mr. Agran said. "Waiting for international action won't do. We can't view ourselves as simply sideline spectators in this global drama."

The *Irvine World News*, however, didn't report on the international aspect of the ordinance.

The paper reported that the ordinance could have a severe impact on local businesses, whose taxes contribute 41% of the city's \$530 million budget.

"The difference between the mayor and the newspaper is that we know where the city borders end and he doesn't," said Brien Manning, *Irvine World News* publisher.

Nor do all on the City Council agree with the ban.

"Irvine doesn't need a global agenda," said Councilmember Sally Anne Sheridan. "The city shouldn't be spending \$250,000 to enforce a chlorofluorocarbon ordinance, or the CFC as it is called." Ms. Sheridan has opposed nearly every measure of the mayor's since her election to the council in 1984.

Also, the manner in which the ordinance was developed has stirred up the business community.

The law was drafted without input from either the 800-member Irvine Chamber of Commerce or the Greater Irvine Industrial League, which represents 900 companies.

"The mayor didn't approach us at all on this one, although he has on others," said Jacquie Woodworth, executive director of the chamber.

"It was drafted by him and people from the University of California at Irvine. This isn't right, having academics write ordinances for the business community."

The ordinance also was drafted with extraordinary speed, she said.

"We heard about it three weeks before it was put before the City Council, which passed it two days before a conference the mayor was involved in."

The conference was a meeting of the Center for Innovative Diplomacy, a national organization comprising academics, government officials and others who are working to shape foreign policy at the local level. Mr. Agran is senior editor of "Municipal Foreign Policy," the

center's journal.

John R. McKay, senior vice president of manufacturing for Western Digital, objected strongly to the ordinance, which will affect Western's \$100 million semiconductor plant in Irvine.

"The plant process uses a chemical banned by the ordinance, but for which there is no known substitute," Mr. McKay said.

"The city gave us absolutely no hint two years ago that such an ordinance was being thought of."

Said Todd Nicholson, president of the Industrial League: "The ordinance is technically flawed and was put together too quickly without our input.

"We intend, however, to work very closely with the mayor's office to ensure that it is refined before it becomes effective next June."

Initiated ordinances

Mr. Agran also has initiated ordinances to limit campaign contributions, to protect human rights, and to track hazardous industrial waste.

In August, the council voted 4-1 to approve a controversial plan to build and finance 3,250 units of affordable rental units, a plan the mayor wanted to make compulsory for developers.

Mr. Agran's chief lieutenant on the council is Cameron Cosgrove. He hammered out an agreement with Irvine Co. to acquire 5,000 more acres of open space in exchange for development concessions. Added to the 11,000 acres the city already owns, the acreage will make Irvine the municipality with the largest open-space holdings in the country.

Mr. Agran maneuvered to place a referendum on the ballot to change the city charter so the mayor would be elected directly. The post, formerly honorary and rotated annually among the five City Council members, was approved in 1987 with a voter turnout of less than 15%.

Ms. Sheridan is openly critical of the change.

"The change gives the mayor more power and undermines the city manager form of government in Irvine's charter," she said. "In fact, one of the first things he did was fire the city manager, a tough, fair-minded man with an international reputation.

"This change also dilutes the power of other council members to yank his chain." The change, however, does not give the mayor any new legislative power.

The mayor, not surprisingly, dis-



Photo by Ruth Chambers

Mayor Larry Agran at Irvine City Hall: 'Waiting for action won't do. We can't view ourselves as sideline spectators in this global drama.'

agrees.

"A city with a strong tradition of activism should have a mayor directly accountable to the electorate," Mr. Agran said. "Besides, the charter says ours is a council-manager form of government, not vice-versa. Through its day-to-day operations, the city manager's office was getting into policy development, which the council should be doing."

Guessing how this progressive politician, active in the student movement at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1960s, came to power in a city with twice as many registered Republicans as Democrats, is almost a parlor game in Irvine.

"If you find out the answer to that, let me know," said Ms. Woodworth of the Chamber of Commerce. But there's no shortage of people with opinions.

"It's Larry's fundamental goals," said Mr. Cosgrove. "They're what people want: open space, managed growth, and the knowledge that

there's someone in City Hall keeping an eye on it. These have nothing to do with partisan politics, which are very destructive to consensus-building on the local level."

A Republican, Mr. Cosgrove supports the national party on national issues.

"But on city issues," Mr. Cosgrove said, "Larry and I sit down together, put aside national politics, and work on the city vision. His critics are working from a national agenda, which doesn't translate to the local level."

The mayor has some thoughts on the subject. "The Irvine Co. conceived of this city as a totally planned community, one designed with strong community input. I am just building on that tradition."

Republicans waking up

Said Ms. Sheridan, "The Republicans have always thought that they so outnumbered the Democrats around here that they have to work at organizing.

"But I think they're finally waking up."

Irvine voters are apathetic about going to the polls, she said, "because they're too busy making payments on their mortgages and BMWs."

"Larry is a very bright man, and full-time political organizer," she said. "He's very good at organizing voters around motherhood and apple-pie issues."

Some think that Mr. Agran's real agenda is his political future.

"The man gets more press than the president," said Ms. Sheridan, who will probably run against him for mayor next year.

Mr. Nicholson of the Industrial League agrees.

"For example, the CFC ordinance. We had both the national and international press calling for weeks," said Mr. Nicholson. "I never saw anything like it before in Irvine."

The mayor doesn't rule out finding a larger stage to play out his ideas.

Mr. Agran freely acknowledges that his election to mayor gives him more clout at the U.S. Conference of Mayors, a group he describes as "less frightened of using government resources to solve problems."

Closer to home, he expects last month's citywide straw vote on toll roads, which was overwhelmingly approved by voters, to give him more leverage with the agency building them (*City & State*, July 31).

"People have encouraged me to think about a statewide office or even a congressional one," Mr. Agran said.

"But right now I'm very happy to be the mayor of this progressive city." ■