

San Luis Obispo County

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## Teller-Gofman debate stirs crowd of 4,000

By Bob Anderson  
Staff Writer

An eager audience of about 4,000 persons Friday night heard Dr. Edward Teller and Dr. John Gofman agree on at least one point about nuclear energy: Much has yet to be learned.

For Gofman, the uncertainties mean nuclear reactors should not be developed. For Teller, they mean nuclear power should not be stopped.

The two distinguished nuclear researchers helped get San Luis Obispo's Nuclear Energy Forum off to a start and pleased the county physicians who organized it. The audience filled all but the corners of the bleachers at Cal Poly's Men's Gymnasium, and folding chairs covering more than half the gym floor.

Both proponents and opponents of nuclear power were well represented in the audience. Applause indicated opponents were the majority.

Informing the public of all sides of the nuclear power issue is the purpose of the two-day free public forum, which continued this morning at 9 a.m. Debates on separate aspects of nuclear power were scheduled to continue until 4 p.m. today.

For Teller, known as "father of the hydrogen bomb," the Nuclear Initiative on next June's ballot is a serious matter with possibly worldwide and long-range consequences.

"You should demand more and more experiments," Teller said Friday night "Until more knowledge is available don't rush to the polls approving limitations on nuclear reactors.

"I'm not sure you realize how really crucial your vote is going to be," he



The audience was eager and responsive. (Photos by Thom Hall)

Other side, please

said. If other states copy California, "the United States will cease to participate in nuclear production."

At this point he was interrupted by applause, although it couldn't be determined whether from proponents or opponents.

"The worldwide energy shortage will increase," Teller continued. "Iran will build its reactors less safely. Dr. Gofman will not be allowed to protest in Iran."

It was the one time Teller referred to Gofman by name. He repeatedly referred to "the previous speaker." Teller also showed what is believed to be a deep personal split with Gofman by appearing at a press conference only after Gofman had left the room.

Teller's point about Iran is behind one of his prime stated reasons for not wanting to hold back nuclear development in the U.S. The U.S. is striving for safety, and has a chance to make nuclear energy "as clean as humanly possible." Other nations, with more pressing needs, will be less careful if the U.S. does not develop safer technology, he said.

But Teller said he would not promise complete safety.

"It is nonsense to say that anything is completely safe," he said. Life itself is "an incurable disease." Whether radiation might cause thousands of deaths annually if nuclear energy were developed on a large scale, as Gofman contends, is unknown, he said. "The answer is in very real doubt." All that can be said with certainty is nuclear energy "is not likely to create a catastrophe," he said.

Opposition to nuclear power comes from fear, Teller said. "All of us like to be frightened of what we don't understand." If atomic bombs had not been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki — as Teller said he at the time did not want to do — the Nuclear Initiative might not be on the ballot.

Teller in his press conference he believes in democracy and the common sense of the average citizen, but wondered if the average voter will give the ballot measure "as much careful thought as the question deserves."

Teller said he would not support the use of nuclear reactors simply for a projected savings of 20 per cent on utility bills.

The best reason for nuclear power is to reduce the "Dollution of poverty" worldwide, which will increase without more energy, he said. In "the filth, disease, despair that flows from that source" are the seeds of war, he said. The U.S. should double its energy, "Not for us, but for the world."

Other energy sources and energy conservation will not supply what is needed, he said.

Gofman argued that "energy efficiency" could save enough energy in the near-term to eliminate the need for nuclear reactors. For the long-term, he quoted a report by the U.S. Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) indicating solar energy could fulfill all of the nation's energy needs. Making new buildings energy-efficient and retro-fitting old ones would be more of a boost for employment and the economy than nuclear power, he said.

Nuclear reactors, Gofman said, could be "white elephants" because the supply of the right kind of fuel is un-

certain. The U.S. is building reactors "that may not be refuelable." If the country planned on a nuclear economy and fuel ran out, economic "havoc" would ensue, he said. He said the nuclear industry's reply to the question of uncertain fuel supplies is, "We could buy foreign uranium," or that reactors could use a type of shale in Tennessee, which pound-for-pound has the same energy value as coal.

Gofman, a medical physicist, argued as much on the basis of economics as medicine and health.

In talking about California's Nuclear Initiative and what would happen without nuclear power, Gofman said nuclear proponents have posed a "vicious, pernicious and false" alternative. "The last refuge of the scoundrel in our modern society" is the argument that doing without nuclear power would mean going back to the

cave, Gofman said. "Wasted energy does not give anybody a standard of living." Scarce capital should be invested not in nuclear power for the "privilege of throwing energy away," but in saving energy, he said.

Gofman said the reason for the government's and industry's push for nuclear power is contained in what might have been "a slip of the tongue" in an ERDA document: "Existing investments must be paid for."

One hundred billion dollars "has been put on the line" by industry, Gofman said. So industry is "going to push nuclear energy down your throat" no matter what risk to you and your children, he said.

Gofman repeatedly attacked the credibility of federal energy officials and industry. He said a "plutonium economy" — based on the not-yet-developed breeder reactor — would mean 500,000 cancer deaths a year. He said he would defend under oath his estimate that one million persons in the Northern Hemisphere already "have been committed irreversibly to lung cancer" by the plutonium spread on the earth by weapons testing.