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Supervisor weighs in on dairy buffer measure

By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer
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For a ballot measure with no clout, Wasco's Measure U continues to make waves.

Less than a week before Wasco residents vote on whether they want an imaginary 10-mile dairy buffer zone around their city -- imaginary because the outcome has no legal authority -- Kern County Supervisor Ray Watson has taken out a large opposition ad in the weekly Wasco Tribune.

Under a bold, headline-esque banner "SUPERVISOR RAY WATSON AIRS DAIRY ISSUE," a half page of text reels off Watson's point of view.

Some key excerpts:

- "The very essence of Measure U is a dangerous concept of limiting property rights ..."
- "The measure ... is arbitrary to the extreme."
- "Regardless of the outcome ... I can assure you that I will make my decision regarding dairies on the merits of individual projects as well as cumulative impacts."
- "Measure U is ... (U)njustified ... (U)necessary ... and it (U)ndermines the image" of Wasco.

Dairies and Wasco have recently locked horns as news bubbled up in June that about 10 proposed projects could bring more than 100,000 cows northwest of the city.

Since then, some Wasco City Council members rallied to put Measure U on the November ballot.

A "yes" vote supports the idea that large new dairy projects should stay at least 10 miles away from town. But the county Board of Supervisors will have no legal reason to heed the outcome.

Local political analyst Gene Tackett said Watson's move was unusual, risky and bold.

"On the one side, this is courageous for Watson to wade into this issue and let people know how he feels," Tackett said. "It's a pretty gutsy thing."

Then again, he added, it could put the supervisor at odds with Wasco residents who might feel "more strongly than he thought."

Tackett said he's rarely seen Kern County supervisors take out position ads, although they aren't unusual for powerful officials like Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is currently using his clout to back initiatives.

Watson said Wednesday he spent \$390.60 from his campaign funds so he wouldn't build up "a false expectation" among residents.

"I felt they deserved to know from me as an elected official what my thinking is and how I would proceed," he said.

Most of the two dozen or so projects proposed countywide are in Watson's district. In all, an estimated 214,000 cows are in the wings. Already, some 290,000 live here at 55 facilities.

The 10-mile buffer proposed in Measure U has no science behind it, Watson said.

At the same time, he emphasized, his opposition doesn't mean he's a doormat for the dairy industry.

"I'm not a dairy guy and I'm not an anti-dairy guy," he said. "But I believe in fairness ... not a tactic somebody uses" to try to force the board to make decisions on "something other than a rational basis."

Watson believes new technology required by the county and state regulators will result in less smelly, non-polluting operations.

This week, Watson brought a proposal to fellow board members to back a statewide dairy inspection program spearheaded by state Sen. Dean Florez, the Shafter Democrat.

"I'm not going to roll over for the dairy industry or anybody if it's going to degrade the quality of life in Kern County," he said. "I'm also not going to say: Hey, we're not even going to consider any dairies."

Wasco resident Ignacio Morales, a former McFarland city official who's attended numerous meetings on the proposed dairy cluster, plans to vote in favor of Measure U.

Morales doesn't feel Watson's stance is supportive of him and other Wasco residents.

"I wouldn't be surprised, when his term is up, that somebody doesn't run against him," Morales said. "You never know. It may be me."

Rare Competitive Race Could Be Most Costly

Money flows into 5th Senate District contest, one of a few not made safe by redistricting.

By Jordan Rau, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, Oct. 28, 2004

VACAVILLE - A California Senate race between two San Joaquin Valley politicians is on the way to being the most expensive in state history. But it is not because of the issues or the candidates.

Instead, analysts say, the \$8-million price tag - anticipated to reach as much as \$10 million by election day - is a testament to lawmakers' success in redrawing district boundaries to ensure that most California seats are safely in the hands of one party or the other.

Within this largely settled political world, Democratic state Sen. Mike Machado's job has become one of the few considered up for grabs, and Republicans are promoting the challenger, Stockton Mayor Gary Podesto, as among their most compelling candidates this year.

"It's just about the only game in town," said Tony Quinn, a redistricting expert who studies California races. "There's always lots of money around, and they've created action here because there isn't anyplace else."

The spending is particularly remarkable given that there are no broader political ramifications.

The results will not change the balance of power in the Senate, where Democrats outnumber Republicans, 25 to 14. Only one other Senate seat, being vacated by Republican Bruce McPherson of Santa Cruz, is considered a tossup, thanks in part to the fact that only half the Senate is up for reelection.

There is more at stake in the California Assembly, where Democrats hold a narrower 48-32 majority. But even there, only a few seats are contested.

Traditionally linked to the city of Stockton, the 5th Senate District has been one of the most competitive in California. After Machado, an Assemblyman from Linden, won his seat in 2000 by only 1,379 votes, lawmakers redrew the district to include the very Democratic cities of Davis and West Sacramento.

The district now stretches so far west that it includes Vacaville, which is closer to San Francisco than to Stockton. As of September, the district's electorate was 45% Democratic and 36% Republican, with 14% declining to state a party.

The campaigns have exchanged more than their share of nasty attack ads, which are almost impossible to avoid on television, given the amount of money that has been pumped into the campaigns: \$3.7 million for Machado and \$4.3 million for Podesto.

Republican consultant Allan Hoffenblum, who publishes the Target Book, an analysis of legislative races, said the candidates have each received more than \$2 million from their

respective parties' state and county committees. Those have become a favored way to funnel large contributions to avoid caps placed on the amount that individual donors can give directly to candidates.

"You don't have the foggiest idea of where the money is coming from, all in the name of 'campaign finance reform,'" Hoffenblum said.

Machado has tagged Podesto as "the king of sprawl," for allowing building expansion around the city. His ads accuse Podesto of being a tool of Stockton developers who helped fund his campaign.

Podesto, a former grocery store owner, has lambasted Machado for sponsoring legislation that could aid a donor, the Southern California Water Co., and also faulted him for \$61,000 in fines that the Fair Political Practices Commission levied in August over Machado's fundraising practices. All of these charges have been playing out in ads that have become as ubiquitous as network promotions for popular shows.

Despite their hefty price tags, the campaigns so far have attempted to maintain the feel of a grass-roots scrimmage.

"Deep down, he's not a politician; he's a farmer with a passion for public service," says one television advertisement for Machado, who has a family farm.

Two of Podesto's ads are done in the tongue-in-cheek style of a cheesy western, with Stockton portrayed as an 1890s Wild West city that Podesto tames by rallying businesses and bringing in a new movie house. ("What's a movie?" one "resident" remarks.) In one ad, Podesto throws some developers out of a window during a dispute.

"The TV and mail in the district is daunting," said Anthony York, the publisher of Political Pulse, a Sacramento newsletter that tracks campaigns. "That Old West ad is the most talked-about ad in the election cycle. It's polarized a lot of people: They either like it or hate it."

The two have sparred over some policy issues, [including legislation passed this year that imposes new rules on air pollution from agriculture](#). Machado voted for the bill, SB 700, but Podesto said he thought it should have better accommodated smaller farmers. One Machado ad bestowed a "Black Lung Award" on Podesto for his qualms.

But those topics have taken a backseat to other factors. In a recognition of the expected influence of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, both candidates have been trying to align themselves with the Republican leader.

Machado has television spots bragging that Schwarzenegger signed more of his bills than of any Republican legislator. He adds: "I don't always agree with Arnold," seeking to further comfort die-hard Democrats by noting endorsements from California's two U.S. senators, both party members.

But the governor is supporting Podesto, for whom he has campaigned and helped raise money. The California Farm Bureau - an influential voice in the farming areas of the San Joaquin Valley - is also running ads for Podesto that highlight Schwarzenegger's endorsement.

In person, both candidates campaign with remarkably mellow manners, given all the attention to the race's sumptuous spending.

On a recent Sunday, Machado showed up in Woodland at a small farmers market where supporters had been invited. Acknowledging the influence of Schwarzenegger - whom Machado

obliquely described as "a guy who took up residency in Sacramento this year" - Machado warned of the dangers of a GOP advance in the Legislature.

Afterward, he downplayed the governor's influence. "Arnold's popular, but people here, they're an astute electorate, and they differentiate between levels of government," Machado said.

Podesto showed far more excitement at Schwarzenegger's intervention on Tuesday, as he loyally trailed behind the governor at a Mexican restaurant in Vacaville, where the two campaigned. A number of the campaign pamphlets that Podesto handed out were promptly converted into material for autographs from the governor, but Podesto beamed as Schwarzenegger praised him.

"We need more people like him. He will be a great support system for me," Schwarzenegger told reporters afterward. "Gary is the man. He's an unbelievable human being, he's a very kind man, smart man. We think alike, and so I'd love to have him here in Sacramento."

The previous spending record for a legislative race was \$6.6 million when Republican Jeff Denham of Salinas won a Central California Senate seat in 2002. The only race this year spending anywhere close to the Machado-Podesto matchup is a \$7.4-million battle for a Bay Area Assembly seat where the Republican candidate, billionaire Steve Poizner, has pitched in \$4.8 million of his own money. Most analysts believe the San Joaquin Valley fight will end up being the most expensive.

Podesto said he was not surprised how much money was being spent in the race. "There was speculation that this was a \$10-million race right from the very beginning. We knew there was a commitment on both sides."

He said the amount could even top the \$8 million he predicted at the start. "Who knows what happens in the next seven days," he said.