

## Clean air plan causes a dust-up

By Mark Arax and Rhashad Pittman, Times Staff Writers

Los Angeles Times

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FRESNO — For the last six months, ever since he put pen to paper on a historic package of air pollution bills, state Sen. Dean Florez has been itching for a fight in his backyard.

He had the cheek, after all, to demand that agriculture, the most powerful industry here, give up its 60-year-old exemption from clean air rules. The fight, at last, has begun — with a punch that Florez says he never saw coming.

The maverick Democrat from Kern County is not only facing opposition from local lawmakers who find it hard to defy agriculture, the region's biggest employer. He is also battling urban legislators — Assembly members from Southern California and the Bay Area — who admittedly have no interest in farm issues and consider themselves advocates for the environment.

Big city colleagues whom Florez counted on to force agriculture to do more to clean the air — Assembly Democrats such as Lou Correa of Anaheim and Leland Yee of San Francisco — have suddenly turned into foes after hearing the complaints of farm groups.

In a committee vote last week, the two lawmakers opposed a Florez bill that would end agriculture's exemption and demand that farms and dairies use less-polluting equipment and methods. Seven other committee members from urban areas, including Assemblyman Fabian Nuñez (D-Los Angeles) abstained in the vote, ensuring the bill's defeat in committee.

Now Florez is engaged in a last-ditch fight to resurrect the legislation. It is a battle that finds him accusing his colleagues from Los Angeles and San Francisco of caring about the health of their own children while ignoring the health of kids in this fast-growing farm belt, which has emerged as the nation's smoggiest basin.

More than 16% of the children in Fresno County, the highest rate in the state, suffer from asthma.

What makes this Capitol quarrel — a feud complete with dueling committee hearings — so disconcerting to folks back here is that it has little to do with clean air and everything to do with petty politics, they say.

Florez may be over-brimming with the righteousness of his cause and unwilling to smooth the way with his colleagues, they say. But some of the urban lawmakers have made it clear to colleagues that their goal in opposing the clean air legislation is a partisan matter. They are seeking to protect the Assembly's most vulnerable Democrat, Nicole Parra (D-Hanford), from defeat next election.

Parra's district happens to include some of the biggest dairy farms in the country — ammonia-spewing factories with 3,000 Holsteins and more. In November,

Parra won the seat by a bare margin, 277 votes. If she loses the support of the farm lobby, it is reasoned, her seat will surely go to a Republican.

Florez says nothing would make farm groups more pleased with Parra than for her to lead the way in killing or watering down his bills. It doesn't help matters that the two Latino politicians, both young and highly ambitious, have been engaged in a sort of Hatfield and McCoy feud that dates back several years to when Parra was a congressional aide.

On past contentious issues, Florez has accused Parra of betraying her roots and siding not with farm workers or the poor but with powerful growers.

"You are standing on the side of those who would like to be allowed to pollute just a little more," Florez wrote to Parra last week. "I am standing on the side of children with asthma, and for them there is no compromise. Personal relationships should not matter when it comes to doing the right thing."

Parra says she supports a clean air bill that would put the valley in compliance with federal standards. But she believes the legislation in its current form would hurt the valley's economy. She and her staff have declined to be more specific. "Mr. Florez wants to make this a personal dispute when the focus should be on policy," said Nicole Winger, Parra's spokeswoman.

Even as the San Joaquin Valley has overtaken the Los Angeles basin as the smoggiest region in the country over the last few years, farmers here continue to enjoy a special status, burning their uprooted trees and vines in bonfires and plowing their cotton fields into clouds of dust.

In March, Florez introduced SB 700 to end agriculture's historic exemption, along with other bills to ban open-field burning and control dairy emissions by Jan 1, 2005. One bill seeks to expand the 11-member regional air district board to include four new members with no farming or oil industry ties, including a respiratory specialist and an environmentalist. Other bills in the Florez package call for tax-exempt bonds and other funds to help farmers underwrite the costs of converting to cleaner equipment.

Florez has held 10 hearings up and down the valley to meet with farmers and residents, tweaking but not fundamentally altering the bills. Farm groups have repeatedly questioned why the legislation was targeting their industry when on-road vehicles and sprawling suburbs account for the lion's share of pollution here.

Florez's reply was simple: Agriculture is the only industry exempt from federal and state clean air rules. In addition, he argued, environmentalists have sued the local air district and the EPA to end the farm exemption and force a cleanup. The lawsuits have put billions of dollars in federal highway funds for California in jeopardy, highlighting the need for decisive action, he said.

Eight of the bills have passed in the Senate. Then last week, on the eve of Assembly consideration of SB 700, Florez says he was sucker-punched. Farm bureau lobbyists had gone to Yee and other urban lawmakers to complain that Florez had shut them out of the process. Parra wrote to her colleagues saying

she was opposing SB 700 and the bill to add a medical and an environmental voice to the local board.

The opposition was enough to defeat SB 700 in committee. Several of the urban lawmakers who abstained or voted against the bill deny they tried to protect Parra or caved in to pressure from farm groups. Yee, for one, says he refused to support the measure because agricultural interests had not been given a full seat at the negotiating table.

"My opposition wasn't about politics or Parra. It's about process," he said. "The two sides have never sat across the table from each other and talked about this historic bill. That just boggles my mind."

Yee said at least one of his colleagues mentioned protecting Parra as his reason for opposing the bill. But several legislators contacted by The Times denied that politics had played a role in their decisions.

Yee decided to hold his own hearing Tuesday night — opposite a hearing held by Florez — to urge agriculture and Florez back to the table. A second vote by the appropriations committee should come Friday, he said, and he has not ruled out supporting the measure.

"The way Dean has been going about this is all wrong," said Yee, a child psychologist and first-term assemblyman. "The guy needs therapy."

Florez says it is ridiculous to think that the farm lobby never got a chance to fully address SB 700 and the other bills. "What were all those months of hearings about?" he asked. "For all this opposition to come at the last minute is a pure power play."

Farm groups say they now support ending agriculture's exemption. What they continue to dispute is the wide net cast by SB 700. It would not only require permits and regulations of big industrial farms but of small and medium-sized vineyards and fruit orchards, as well.

"The problem with the Florez bill is that it assumes that if you're a farmer, you're a gross polluter," said Karla Kay Fullerton of the Fresno County Farm Bureau. "If you have one tractor, you are treated the same as the farmer with 100 tractors. It's just too broad."

## **Consensus remains elusive in talks on clean-air measure**

By Jennifer M. Fitzenberger  
Bee Capitol Bureau

*(Published Wednesday, August 27, 2003, 5:30 AM)*

SACRAMENTO -- Both sides of a bill seeking to clean the Valley's dirty air left a marathon meeting Tuesday frustrated but hopeful that further talk will bring them closer to a compromise.

The daylong probe into details of Senate Bill 700, which would end the agriculture industry's historic exemption from air operating permits, closed with unanswered questions and retorts that opposition isn't willing to bend.

"The problem is they want us to walk all the way to their house, and we want to meet them halfway," said Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who wrote the controversial bill.

"To reach a consensus, the [California] Farm Bureau needs to come to its senses."

Agriculture leaders said they want clean air but contend Florez's bill puts them in a procedural and financial corner. The bill -- and amendments Florez drew up and proposed Tuesday -- is welcome movement but a long way from acceptable, they said.

"I think they're heading in the right direction, but it's not nearly what we were looking for," said Roger Isom, vice president of California Cotton Ginners and Growers Associations.

Isom was one of more than a dozen negotiators from interests ranging from agriculture to the environment who met about the bill.

The group will continue discussion today. SB 700, which stalled in last week's Assembly Appropriations Committee, is set for reconsideration later this week.

"I think [today] is going to be the D-day," said Assembly Member Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, who is caught in the political crossfire. "If we don't get something out, I think World War III will start, and I'm not interested in having that battle."

At issue are the parameters of the bill -- the linchpin of Florez's aggressive eight-bill clean-air package. SB 700 hung in Appropriations after urban Democrats, including Yee, voted it down.

Florez accused the group, which typically supports environmental legislation, of politically sabotaging his bill to keep it from the floor, where Assembly Member Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, would be asked for her vote.

Parra, after barely winning her seat last year, is considered vulnerable in her next election. Taking a firm stance on the bill could give her opponents political ammunition.

Yee, who attended Tuesday's hearing, said he is a "sympathetic listener" to farmers who believed they didn't get a fair shake from Florez. Their outcry prompted his stiff stance on the bill, he said.

Yee said banter during the hearing is evidence that both sides did not fully understand or appreciate their opponent's problem.

"I am very pleased that Mr. Florez moved. I am very pleased that the farmers moved," Yee said. "Both sides hopefully need to move a little [more] so everybody can be supportive of the bill."

Forced by an environmental lawsuit settlement, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last year told California to repeal the exemption for the agriculture industry or face statewide sanctions.

The sanctions, including increased fees for some businesses and eventual suspension of billions of dollars in highway-building funds, will begin in November unless the loophole is repealed.

Instead of simply repealing the exemption, Florez's bill also would require farmers to use the most up-to-date technology to control Valley farm sources of particle pollution and dust.

Among other requirements, the bill would force owners of large animal operations, such as dairies, to obtain an operating permit.

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## Ag air-pollution talks turn testy

By Jake Henshaw, Sacramento Bureau

Tulare Advance Register, August 27, 2003

SACRAMENTO -- A late Monday evening meeting led by a San Francisco legislator dealing with a San Joaquin Valley air-pollution bill produced sometimes tense exchanges, no agreement but promises of more negotiations.

The meeting represented the latest effort to enact Sen. Dean Florez's Senate Bill 700, a controversial bill that would end agriculture's decades-long exemption from having to get federal clean air permits.

The evening meeting organized by Assemblyman Leland Yee came after farm lobbyists, who oppose the measure, failed to attend an afternoon hearing and another evening meeting hosted by Florez.

That prompted an unhappy Florez, D-Shafter, first to criticize the industry for a "lack of courage" to discuss amendments to his bill at the public hearing and then later to march into Yee's meeting to upbraid the lobbyists.

Florez also chided Yee for failing to inform him of the San Francisco Democrat's meeting.

"Why didn't you come to the hearing?" Florez asked.

"We just wanted to negotiate a bill ... and the press was there [and] that's not where you usually negotiate a bill," Cynthia Cory, a lobbyist for the California Farm Bureau, responded as about 60 agriculture and other lobbyists watched.

"We're playing on your bill, so you got what you want, so go for it," Florez said.

Then he added, "You don't have a very happy senator."

The lobbyists already had been criticized by Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes, D-Fresno, who initially shuttled between the two evening meetings trying to get the lobbyists to move to the room occupied by Florez.

"Quite frankly, this isn't going to work," she told the group before Florez showed up.

Claiming the role of "senior Assembly member" present at Yee's meeting, Reyes then cajoled participants into agreeing to a nonstop meeting of about a dozen lobbyists and lawmakers today intended to hammer out a compromise on the bill.

"No one goes home [today]," she said.

But there also was acknowledgment that it may not be possible to reach agreement, and Florez emphasized that he wasn't going to let opponents kill the bill by stalling it until the Legislature finishes its work for the year Sept. 12.

"We're not going to run out the clock," Florez said.

The bill is scheduled for a second vote Thursday in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, where it failed last week.

Reyes is a member of the committee along with Yee, who offered amendments sought by farmers. Assemblyman Steve Samuelian, R-Clovis, a committee member, also attended Yee's meeting.

The bill's previous failure in committee set off a testy exchange between Florez and Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, who opposes the bill.

"You are on the side of those who would like to be allowed to pollute jut a little more," Florez wrote Parra in a letter.

That was in response to a letter from Parra saying she was concerned about the opposition to the bill. On Monday she added that an uncertain funding could make it difficult to implement this and other Florez air control bills.

"Personally attacking me does nothing," she said Monday.

SB700 is part of an effort to help the Valley, which has some of the dirtiest air in the nation, meet federal requirements and avoid sanctions that could cut federal transportation funds by more than \$2 billion.

In the Monday meeting, farm representatives presented a three-page comparison of their preferred amendments with the bill, but the discussion never moved beyond the first item that the lobbyists insisted could bring even rabbit hutches under regulation.

"They're not going to regulate a rabbit hutch," Reyes said with support from some air district offices present.

"Then why put a rabbit hutch in state law?" Cory asked.

Farm groups have agreed to accept minimum federal requirements but oppose parts of SB700 that go further, particularly in regulating confined animals.

But they responded with uncertainty to suggestions for amendments that would treat agriculture like all other industries, saying the effects are unknown.

"This industry is not doing its share" to reduce air pollution, said John White, a lobbyist for the Sierra Club.

But Manuel Cunha, president of the Nisei Farmers League, later said his industry now must meet some clean air rules and has taken steps such as replacing old diesel engines with new ones to cut pollution.

"We are regulated, and we are doing our share," he said.

The whole experience left Yee trying to find a way "to get myself out of this craziness."

[Visalia Times-Delta opinion piece, August 27, 2003:](#)

## **Air quality bill hurts Valley ag**

Everyone wants to see the air get better in the San Joaquin Valley. The agricultural community is doing its part and is prepared to do more. But if a proposal in the state Legislature by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, is approved in its current form, too many people may be breathing that air from the unemployment line.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has made it clear that we need new rules that will bring the Valley into compliance with federal regulations. The farm community is making these changes.

In the past four years, on a voluntary basis, agriculture has upgraded over 3000 diesel irrigation pumps, thereby reducing NOX emissions by over 2,000 tons per year. Growers have oiled over 600 miles of unpaved roads and are using a pressure resource, water, more often on those that remain. This has led to a reduction in PM 10 emissions in excess of 500 tons per year. Burning is being replaced by chipping to the extent possible at a cost approaching \$400 per acre for some growers.

These are the same plants and trees that serve as ozone scrubbers and oxygen providers.

Florez's SB700 stretches far beyond federal direction, in some cases its goals are unobtainable technically. Thus while this bill talks about clean air, the probability of unintended and problematic consequences are high, not only for agriculture but the general population as well.

The bill, for example, provides that every place an animal is confined for feeding - - that would mean every horse corral or even a rabbit hutch -- would have to meet new and complicated emission reporting requirements. The bill would require multiple permits for irrigation pumps and gasoline tanks leading to layers of bureaucracy and higher costs.

It imposes San Joaquin Valley-specific mandates on producers throughout the state. The proposal is so broad that it regulates every agricultural entity and activity. Many of the internal combustion engines used on every farm would be impacted. Finally, local air pollution control offices and our regional board would lose all flexibility in dealing with Valley specific issues.

California's agricultural statistical service reports that for the past five years revenues for agriculture have been flat and net income is off 40 percent. Like every other business in the state, we too have absorbed higher energy costs, obscene workers' comp increases, huge jumps in health insurance premiums, and with the passing of the recent budget major fee, assessment and levy increases will be felt as well.

SB 700 will require the purchases of new equipment or require costly modifications all at once. Our costs are fixed locally while our revenues are determined globally.

The margin between the two is non-existent and something will suffer. Most likely it will be jobs and then agribusinesses.

We have expressed these concerns to Sen. Florez and to the members of the Appropriations Committee. We have suggested changes that would satisfy federal requirements, help clean our air; all without crippling Central Valley agriculture. Sen. Florez has spurned all efforts to write a bill that will accomplish all these objectives.

Now he blames his problems on political opposition rather than focusing on constructive comments from stakeholders and members of his own political persuasion.

Fortunately for the residents of the San Joaquin Valley, a majority of the members of the Assembly committee -- Democrats and Republicans -- refused to pass Florez' ill-conceived bill. They looked at the substance and found it lacking.

The committee has given Florez one more chance to help the San Joaquin Valley air situation. He should take this opportunity to work with his peers and not blame them for his bill's failings.

This column represents the views of Earl Williams, president, California Cotton Growers & Ginners Association; Joel Nelsen, president, California Citrus Mutual; Barry Bedwell, president, California Grape & Tree Fruit League; and Manuel Cunha, president, Nisei Farmers' League.

## **Federal ag money aimed at Valley air \$5.5m in matching fund is offered for cleanup.**

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

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While political haggling continues in Sacramento over regulating agriculture's air pollution, the U.S. Department of Agriculture this week committed \$5.5 million for voluntary cleanup efforts by farmers.

"Voluntary" for San Joaquin Valley farmers means they must match the federal funds with \$5.5 million of their own money.

More than 500 growers will be involved in spending \$11 million on projects, such as replacing aging diesel engines on their farms, to remove tons of air pollution.

The collaborative process contrasts with tense negotiations between farm officials and state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, over his Senate Bill 700, which would lift agriculture's decades-old exemption from air operating permits and guide regulation of the industry.

The Florez legislation, which failed to clear the Appropriations Committee of the Assembly last week, is supposed to come up for another vote this week. The farm exemption must be repealed or California will face federal sanctions late this year.

State and federal officials have turned more attention to Central California air quality because the Valley is among the three worst basins in the country. Estimates indicate farming contributes about half of the particle pollution in dust and about 25% of the smog-creating gases.

With the \$5.5 million announced this week, the Agriculture Department has increased its ag air incentives fivefold over last year. The money, provided by the 2002 Farm Bill, illustrates that federal officials recognize the Valley's need for clean-air incentives, say local farm representatives.

"It's a significant chunk of change," said Roger Isom, vice president of the Fresno-based California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association. "But the growers have to provide up to 50% of the money to make it work, too."

Farm officials say their industry has been working on voluntary cleanup for years. The Agriculture Department incentive funds, which come through the Natural Resource Conservation Service, have been funneled to farmers since 1998.

The state also has kicked in millions through the Carl Moyer Program for engine upgrades. More than 2,200 farm diesel engines have been upgraded in the last few years.

Farmers also treat unpaved roads with oil to hold down dust, and some now use wood chippers instead of field burning to dispose of waste. Most recently, they have begun reducing dust by making fewer tractor passes over their fields.

"We have realized a substantial, 2,179-ton [annual] reduction in air pollutants since 1998 in the San Joaquin Valley," said conservationist Chuck Bell of the federal conservation service.

Officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District support the strategy of offering to pay for part of the pollution-trimming measures.

"When the changes result in quantifiable emission reductions, the air gets cleaner," said Jeff Findley, supervising air quality planner. "And everyone wins."

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[Letters to the Editor, The Fresno Bee, Aug. 27, 2003:](#)

## **'Offensive' editorial**

By Nicole M. Parra  
Member of the Assembly  
30th District

*(Published Wednesday, August 27, 2003, 5:32 AM)*

I was stunned to read your Aug. 22 editorial ("Taking care of No. 1.") My family and I live and breathe in the Valley, too.

I reiterate my unequivocal support for a clean air bill that will put the Valley in compliance with federal air standards. This will protect the health of our children and help all residents breathe easier.

It is my job to look out for every one of my constituents as I analyze and vote on hundreds of pieces of legislation in the state Assembly. You allege I "did not want to have to vote" on SB 700, which has yet to reach the Assembly floor. If that were the case, I certainly would not have expressed my concerns with that particular bill in its current form months ago, and I would not have been working hard to bring together all Valley constituents in order to find a way for this and other air quality bills to succeed.

It is offensive to every resident of the Valley to allege that my hard work is predicated on political survival. I have worked for the last 11 years at the state and federal levels on behalf of the Valley, focusing on job creation, better schools, health care access, safer communities and cleaner air and water. I was elected to the Assembly last year, and I take my public service very seriously. I will continue to fight for good public policy throughout my lifetime in the Valley, whether or not I am an elected official.

## **Ag is working hard**

By Debbie Jacobsen  
Fresno County Farm Bureau

*(Published Wednesday, August 27, 2003, 5:32 AM)*

The agricultural community is committed to full participation in addressing air quality challenges facing all of us in the Valley. While agriculture has endured criticism for not doing its part and for seeking exemptions, farmers and ranchers have, in reality, been working on a voluntary basis for several years to change their on-farm practices for the benefit of clean air.

In the past four years, on a voluntary basis, agriculture has upgraded more than 3,000 diesel irrigation pumps statewide, reducing NOx emissions by more than 2,000 tons per year. Additionally, agriculture has treated more than 600 miles of unpaved roads, reducing PM10 emissions by more than 500 tons per year, and

burning of orchard prunings has been replaced with chipping on more than 8,300 acres, reducing emissions. No other industry in California can make that claim.

We have offered amendments to SB 700 that would insert EPA-approved language in to the California Health and Safety Code to remove the age exemption for major stationary sources of air pollution and impose permits on those sources. Additionally, industry-proposed language would remove the threat of losing federal highway funding. There is bipartisan support for the ag-industry proposed amendments.

Many of our Fresno leaders are "fighting the good fight" on our behalf -- Fresno County Supervisors Judy Case, Phil Larson and Bob Waterston, and state Assembly Members Dave Cogdill, Bill Maze, Nicole Parra and Steve Samuelian. Other county supervisors have also sent letters and resolutions of opposition on SB 700, including Kings, Madera and Tulare.

Without a question, farmers and ranchers are concerned about clean air.

## **Editorial: Gagging on clean air trick**

The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday August 26, 2003, 06:15:15 PM

Unless grownups real political leaders step forward in Sacramento, a few political careers will benefit at the expense of the Central Valley's asthma-plagued children.

In the same week a national organization again ranked Fresno and Bakersfield, respectively, as the nation's second and third most dangerous places to breathe, a Democrat assemblyman from San Francisco launched a surprise attack on state Sen. Dean Florez's air cleanup bill.

Kern's Florez contends Assemblyman Leland Yee's maneuver to derail SB 700 is intended to shield Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, from voting on the bill, which would end agriculture's air pollution control exemption.

Parra, whose re-election is targeted by Republicans, denies the charge, countering she opposes Florez's bill because of its potential impact on agriculture.

She also points to the bill's opposition in her district. The boards of supervisors in Fresno, Merced, Tulare and Kings counties have passed resolutions in opposition.

These boards have sided with agricultural interests opposing air pollution controls. City councils, such as Fresno's and Bakersfield's, have sided with the people who live and breathe in the valley. They passed resolutions supporting SB 700 and other air cleanup bills authored by Florez.

The real issues and concerns are getting lost in the heated, personal debate raging since Yee's surprise attack last week.

\* The Central Valley's air is polluted. It is making people, particularly children, the elderly and medically fragile, sick. It is stifling economic growth.

\* To settle a legal challenge filed by environmental groups, the federal Environmental Protection Agency ordered California to end an exemption that freed agriculture from complying with the Clean Air Act or face penalties.

\* Agriculture may not be the main cause of the Central Valley's polluted air, but some estimate its dust and equipment emissions amounts to about one-fifth of the problem.

\* Many farmers are voluntarily implementing pollution-reducing techniques.

It is important for us to recognize the contribution agriculture makes to our lives and the commitment some farmers have to the environment.

The fact remains, however, that this commitment no longer can be "voluntary." No industry, especially one of California's major industries, can be "exempt" from air cleanup laws. But the laws applied to agriculture must be reasonable and effective.

To that end, Florez conducted hearings throughout the Central Valley and amended his bills to address agriculture's concerns. While additional amendments may be needed, the bills must not be gutted, as Yee seems intent on doing.

Yee denies he is doing agriculture's bidding on behalf of vulnerable Central Valley Democrats, including Parra. But it's hard to believe a San Francisco Democrat who would quickly side with a Delta smelt, rather than give Kern farmers the water they need, suddenly becomes agriculture's champion.

Stop the political maneuvering and career protecting. Pass legislation that satisfies EPA's demands, treats agriculture fairly and cleans up the valley's dirty air.

## **Both sides talking on smog bill**

By VIC POLLARD, Californian Sacramento Bureau

The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday August 26, 2003, 09:10:11 PM

SACRAMENTO -- The political storm around Sen. Dean Florez's major clean-air bill for the San Joaquin Valley died down Tuesday, at least long enough for supporters and critics of the measure to start talking to each other.

That was a marked change after days of angry exchanges between Florez and Assembly Democrats, most notably Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, who represents much of the same area of Kern County as Florez, a Democrat from Shafter.

Florez has been accusing Democrats on the Assembly Appropriations Committee of trying to scuttle the bill to protect Parra, D-Hanford, from having to

vote on an issue that could be controversial in her west-side district. She is considered one of the most vulnerable Democratic incumbents in next year's legislative elections.

Florez's bill would end agriculture's traditional exemption from clean-air rules, requiring farmers and dairies to get permits for many of their operations and take steps to reduce air pollution.

Up to now, farm organizations have strongly opposed the measure, saying it would impose more costs and restrictions on farm operations than are necessary under a looming federal deadline.

On Tuesday, agriculture lobbyists and environmental supporters of the measure sat down in a Capitol conference room and opened negotiations on the measure. Farm representatives said it was the first time Florez was willing to discuss possible changes, although he says he has been negotiating for months.

The meeting was called by Assemblyman Leland Yee, D-San Francisco. Since last week, Yee has been urging Florez to discuss the bill with farm representatives.

That initially drew an outburst from Florez. He charged that Yee was leading the effort to kill or weaken the bill to protect Parra. Both Yee and Parra denied that.

Late Monday, facing likely defeat of the measure in a second Appropriations Committee vote later this week, Florez agreed to meet with critics of the measure.

During Tuesday's negotiating session farm groups voiced deep fears about having to live with onerous new anti-smog rules written originally for smokestack industries.

In a discussion of emissions inventories that would be required of dairies, Gary Conover of Western United Dairymen said he worried that his members would have to conduct complicated scientific measurements of ammonia emissions from manure lagoons, and dust from corrals.

"I'm very concerned that the animal owner, the dairyman, is going to have a tremendous burden," Conover said.

Florez and other supporters assured him that the inventory would consist of such things as the number of cows on the dairy, and the number and kind of stationary engines.

Local air pollution control district officials would calculate the actual emissions based on formulas that would be discussed with dairy groups in advance, they said.

The bill negotiations, opened to the press in a rare exception to the normal practice of holding such talks in secret, were expected to continue Tuesday night and possibly today.

Any changes agreed to would be incorporated into the bill before the next Appropriations Committee vote, Thursday or Friday.

## Family feud detracts from legislation

By Robert Price, Californian staff columnist

The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday August 26, 2003, 09:45:14 PM

If Nicole Parra intended to dash our expectations, good, bad or otherwise, she has succeeded.

Parra, elected to the Assembly just nine months ago, was once portrayed by critics as a left-of-Lenin liberal who accepted money from (gasp!) lesbian lawmakers and, as one memorable hit piece suggested, intended to make Bakersfield "just like Berkeley."

As Parra nears the halfway point of her first term, she has clarified a few things.

(1) Not only is she *not* left of Vladimir Lenin, she's not even left of Dean Florez, a Democratic centrist if there ever was one. (2) If I'm completely wrong about (1) it's because Parra has given me so little to go on.

During her first few months in Sacramento, Parra abstained from Assembly votes with alarming frequency, apparently saving her most forceful advocacy -- generally behind the scenes -- for whatever position pits her against Florez, the state senator from Shafter who is apparently the Parra family nemesis.

This month, that means she's gloating about the difficulties that have slowed the progress of SB 700, the Florez-sponsored anti-smog bill that would ratchet up clean-air restrictions on the state's agriculture industry. California's Central Valley has some of the dirtiest air in the nation, and the region's No. 1 industry is a big reason why.

No Berkeleyite worth her tie-dyed sundress gloats about faltering clean-air legislation.

More so than any single piece of legislation, Parra's brief tenure as an assemblywoman has been defined by her apparent animosity toward the man whose previous job she now holds.

The Parra-Florez feud has escalated beyond counterproductive and is fast approaching bizarre. Each accuses the other of making it personal; it certainly is, though most people are hard-pressed to remember how and when it started. But it's likely Parra inherited the feud from her father, Kern County Supervisor Pete Parra.

Florez actively supported then-candidate Pete Parra in 1996, and Parra worked in support of Florez in 1998. Things went downhill almost immediately afterward.

In the spring of 1999, about five months after Florez unseated the 30th Assembly District's imminently forgettable Republican incumbent, tens of thousands of idled farmworkers were dealing with a devastating winter freeze that wiped out much of the citrus crop. Disaster relief stations, offering food, job referrals, rent and

utility aid, were set up throughout the valley -- including Lamont, one of Pete Parra's strongest bases of support.

Counselors with Employers' Training Resource, a job training agency that managed the Lamont relief station, tried to pack the house with needy farmworkers to coincide with a visit by Congressman Cal Dooley -- or so a leaked ETR memo suggested. The made-to-impress event was a shoulder-to-shoulder disaster.

Florez told *The Californian* relief-effort officials in Lamont had tried to inflate the number of farmworkers seeking help in order to attract attention. "This is a competition between regions," Florez said at the time. "That has to end."

Parra, a former ETR chief executive, was said to have been highly irritated by Florez's statement.

Later disagreements over the best way to deal with recurring floods in Lamont -- and who should get the credit for trying to solve it -- further enlivened the feud.

There's no question Nicole Parra is in a tough spot today. Republicans will come after her hard next year -- and they'll probably put some money into the race this time.

Parra, probably the most vulnerable Democrat in the Assembly, needs to temper opposition from the ag industry in 2004. And her Democratic colleagues appear willing to protect her -- even if she seems to have staked out a position on air quality that doesn't jibe with the positions you'd expect them to take.

Florez answers to a different set of priorities. He's more likely to look at issues from a statewide perspective. (He makes no secret of the fact that he'll eventually seek statewide office.) He's hard-nosed and independent, too: If he's willing to take on a governor from his own party, how worried could he be about mussing the hair of a freshman assemblywoman?

But the feud is getting tiresome. I don't care if Parra and Florez don't invite each other to their birthday parties. I don't even care if they agree on policy. All I ask is that they *talk* policy, and be halfway civil about it.

## **Board votes to oppose buffers**

By Davin McHenry, Californian staff writer  
The Bakersfield Californian  
Tuesday August 26, 2003, 10:15:13 PM

County supervisors voted Tuesday to oppose a dairy buffer bill proposed by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter.

And they got a tongue-lashing from some Shafter residents for doing so.

Florez has proposed a Senate bill that would block any dairies within three miles of cities or schools, unless the cities and schools sign off.

Supervisors have opposed the bill before, and voted to send a second letter to Sacramento saying so. The letter argues that the bill would take dairy decision-making power out of their hands.

But some Shafter residents didn't see it that way. They argued that the board has repeatedly ignored cities and schools opposed to dairy projects.

"We tried to go through the process and we still feel like we aren't being listened to," said Susie Richards, a local resident.

Shafter became the latest community to protest dairies, starting last year when a dairy was approved just west of town.

Residents complained it was too close to nearby Maple School and the city. Both the school district and the City Council formally voted to oppose the dairy.

But supervisors approved it anyway.

"The cities and schools have been begging for a say and they were ignored," said Tom Frantz, who lives west of Shafter. "What is wrong with a little local control? You don't like it when the state government (overrules local control), but you will do it to the cities."

Florez was also blunt, saying the board has been "bought, lock, stock and barrel by the dairy industry, period.

"By their vote today, the Board of Supervisors told the residents of Kern County that they didn't care if children have clean air to breathe, or suffer from more asthma attacks due to the ammonia that dairies emit," he said. "They told cities and schools that they don't matter. That somehow the board is better at making these types of decisions than they are."

Despite the complaints, supervisors continued to argue that Florez's bill is wrongheaded.

Supervisor Barbara Patrick said approving or denying dairies in the county should be her decision -- and she should be the one held accountable.

Supervisor Ray Watson, who has led the charge against the bill, said the legislation would end up doing nothing to stop pollution in the valley. Instead it would just push dairies a little farther away, he said.

Watson said the state should be working to promote dairy digesters that convert polluting materials into electricity rather than creating "arbitrary" buffers.

He and other supervisors also argued that they were not against buffers completely. They said they supported customized buffers that have been drafted by cities.

Shafter and Wasco actually drafted such a buffer earlier this year, but pulled it from consideration once Florez proposed his bill.

## **Transit would not only be for casino**

**By Gary Gilbert**

*Special to the Madera Tribune*

Monday, August 25, 2003

In an attempt to set the record straight and clarify any misconceptions regarding the Chuk-chansi Gold Resort and Casino employee transit service, I would like to state that neither the tribe nor casino has requested this service.

First and foremost, the concept and design is for "all public" use. We should be able to agree that Eastern Madera County is underserved when it comes to public transportation.

The request for the study was made by me and funded 50 percent (\$4,000) by the county's Social Services/Welfare to Work Program and the remaining 50 percent was funded by the City of Madera.

The total unemployment for all of Madera County is 12.1% and when you look specifically at the City of Madera during the peak harvest season it's 17.3 percent to a high of 23 to 24 percent during the winter.

So we now have a major community with pockets of high unemployment or underemployment, coupled with a lack of reliable personal transportation.

Thus it seems we should seek opportunities to increase inter-county transportation systems. I think you would agree, where we can we should connect unemployed or underemployed people to employment.

The valley floor has an agriculture economy that historically is seasonal in nature, pays minimum wages, requires minimal skills and often provides no benefits such as health insurance.

So, what was actually being discussed? Two areas, a pilot public transit program that would transport both employees and the public up and down the Highway 41 corridor, and, funding for a public transit service.

Funding could come from a variety of sources, including State Transportation Development Act Funds (LTF/STA) Federal Transit Administration funds and "fare box" revenues. Other non-traditional sources could also be used, including [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality \(CMAC\)](#) Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Job Access and Revenue Commute (JARC), and at no time, have we discounted the casino, or any other employer, paying their fair share.

As you are aware, the Chukchansi Gold Resort and Casino opened June 25. The casino operates 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

At full capacity the casino is projected to provide jobs for up to 1,500 employees

and will be Madera County's largest private employer.

It is estimated that 600 of its current employees reside in Madera County, with 450 living in the City of Madera and adjacent areas and 150 residing in Eastern Madera County.

During the casino's hiring process, it was identified that many potential employees expressed a lack of transportation to and from employment.

The casino now employs over 50 clients of the Madera County Department of Social Services, who were on public assistance.

I would hope that with year- around employment, paying living wages with benefits, coupled with reliable transportation that we can break this vicious cycle of unemployment, sub-standard housing and inadequate health care for many of our county residents.

It has been estimated that there will be approximately 30 percent turnover of casino employees in the first yea. Let's hope that it is not Madera County residents because they lacked basic, dependable transportation. Perhaps we need to position ourselves so that if there is a 30 percent turnover, we can provide another 450 Madera County residents year- around employment that pays a living wage, and has benefits such as health care, retirement and many other things that so many take for granted.

Remember, quality of life begins with a job. With jobs that provide a living wage, cities and counties can address the major budget problems facing us all, that being expenditures for levels of service and revenues to pay for those much-needed services of police, fire and libraries.

Revenues (taxes) come from people (taxpayers) with jobs that pay living wages.

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County Supervisor Gary Gilbert represents Supervisor District 5.