

Board of Supervisors: Kern to discuss plan for fees

BY JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Monday, June 2, 2008

Kern County planning and road officials are fielding a plan that could shake a fundamental understanding of how development rights work locally.

On Tuesday, they will recommend several ways Kern County supervisors could remove protections that keep traffic impact fee increases from affecting development maps that were approved years ago.

But Kern County Roads Commissioner Craig Pope said the staff is just giving supervisors options to discuss.

At stake - in the county areas of metro Bakersfield alone - is at least \$23.8 million in road improvement fees.

County officials say getting those fees may be critical to reducing air pollution and protecting the public from health impacts associated with smog and other pollutants.

Developers are working to understand what the county's proposal could do to their businesses.

Dave Dmohowski, a civil engineer in the industry, said he has yet to look over the information closely enough to make a statement about the county's plan.

But he said the protections for vesting tract maps were put in place in the 1980s to protect development from fee increases.

Developers, especially in Southern California, found they couldn't finish later phases of their developments because of "rapidly increasing impact fees" Dmohowski said.

City and county staff have proposed a per-home-lot fee of \$14,940 - a sharp increase from the city's current fee of \$9,500 and the county's fee of \$12,598.

County officials report there are 3,490 unrecorded housing lots in vested tract maps in the unincorporated area of metropolitan Bakersfield. The county could lose \$23.8 million in traffic impact fees, a county report states, if all those lots were recorded and built under the \$5,780 per-lot fee that existed before December 2007.

And there are millions more at stake if the \$14,940 impact fee is passed by the county in the near future.

The extra \$2,342 per lot could bring in \$8 million more for county road-building efforts.

In the most aggressive option being presented to supervisors Tuesday, the county would reject all building permits until the developer agrees to pay the most recent impact fee.

Pope said that isn't necessarily county staff's recommendation.

"It could end up that way, but it's more of a response to the board about what our options are," Pope said. "This is more just an option item. We'll see where the item goes with the board."

VESTING

When the county approves a "vesting tentative tract map" on a developer's property, it locks in the level of a wide range of fees the developer is required to pay - including impact fees.

The developer then has three years - with a possible three-year extension - to "record" the map and start pulling building permits.

Once the map is recorded the developer has one year - with a one-year extension - to pull those permits.

As long as those deadlines are running, the developer pays only the fees that were in place when the vesting map was approved.

How they could change:

Option one: The county could deny the three-year extension for tentative maps unless the developer agrees to the higher traffic fees.

Option two: The county could deny the one-year extension for recorded maps unless the developer agrees to pay the higher fee. The city of Bakersfield currently uses this option.

Option three: The county could deny all building permits pulled by developers unless they agree to pay higher fees.

How to go

The Kern County Board of Supervisors meets for morning and afternoon sessions at 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. Tuesday at the county administrative center, 1115 Truxtun Ave., across N Street from the Rabobank Arena downtown.

You can also watch the meeting live on KGOV, the county's local cable television station. The station lists available channels at www.co.kern.ca.us/gsd/KGOV.

Money matters for conservation

Written by Jonathan Partridge

Patterson Irrigator, Friday, May 30, 2008

WESTLEY - A handful of growers, regulators and agency representatives on Wednesday voiced opinions about how money should be spent on an environmental stewardship program funded by the federal Farm Bill.

About five people gathered at the Westley fire station with local staff of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service to discuss priorities for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

The 11-year-old EQIP program provides cost-sharing opportunities through various conservation programs. In Stanislaus County, it has been used for confined animal feeding operations and air quality and water quality programs among others.

"The primary purpose is really to help the people help the land," said Christopher Hartley, district conservationist with the NRCS Modesto field office.

In Stanislaus County, \$3.2 million was spent on 89 projects through the EQIP program in 2007.

Attendees on Wednesday discussed courses in irrigation management, reduced-risk pest management and other water-related measures as potential priorities.

Pest management particularly could become an issue, attendees said. The state Department of Pesticide Regulation is in the process of tightening regulations on pesticide use in the San Joaquin Valley, Ventura County and the Imperial Valley, in accordance with a court order. Fumigant limitations likely will be required in the San Joaquin Valley starting next year.

Volatile organic compounds, which are the target of the regulations, are substances that easily evaporate and contribute to smog.

"In agriculture around here, fumigants are a huge elephant in the room," said Patricia Matteson, associate environmental research scientist for the state Department of Pesticide Regulation.

Attendees talked about pesticide spray applicators with electric sensors that help spray directly onto plants, but they said the technology is still costly.

Matteson said pesticide regulation officials were willing to work with growers through voluntary programs.

Water efficiency also was a priority expressed at the meeting. One attendee said many growers are missing out on cost-savings benefits by flooding their fields when only a couple of inches of water will do the trick - if, that is, it's implemented properly.

Some projects that are eligible for EQIP funding will not be in the future, because the program will not cover things that are mandated by law, Hartley explained.

For instance, a program that pays nut tree growers to prevent outdoor wood burning will end in 2010, when such burning becomes illegal.

Hartley said there still are many unknowns about how what programs will be funded through EQIP this year.

"With the new Farm Bill, a whole lot of things will be adjusted," he said.

The NRCS will have two more meetings in Stanislaus County - one in Turlock and one in Oakdale. A work group will make recommendations on local priorities for the EQIP program in August.

Hartley said he hopes to know by September how much EQIP money will be allocated to Stanislaus County.

At a Glance

Written comments on priorities for the program may still be submitted via e-mail to lisa.alamo@ca.nacdn.net; or mailed to: Stanislaus County Natural Resources Work Group, 3800 Cornucopia Way, Ste. E, Modesto 95358. For information: 491-9320, ext. 121.

Farmland Hits the Jet Stream

Same Conditions in Midwest Created Dust Bowl

By Staff Writer

Valley Voices Newspaper, Monday, June 02, 2008

San Joaquin Valley - Last week, skies were a gritty brown on the Westside of the Valley and several days of blowing dust prompted health warnings throughout the region.

Along segments of Interstate 5, the California Highway Patrol escorted traffic through the dark dirty clouds similar to what they do during winter Tule fog events. On Highway 99, several accidents resulted.

"My husband drove with his headlights on during the day, driving from the western part of the Valley back to Fresno," says Sarah Woolf, spokesperson for the Westlands Water District.

Woolf says the weather in western Fresno County last week made it seem "like we were back in Kansas ready for a tornado" to reach down and whisk it all away.

The truth was that San Joaquin's farmland was being whisked away by the ton.

Three bone-dry months, coupled with periods of breezy then blustery winds, created dust storms fueled by thousands of acres of fallow farm land – empty sections of land not being irrigated this year because of lack of water or fear there would not be enough water.

In Westlands, about a third of the 600,000-acre district is not being irrigated and many of those 200,000 acres are just empty, confirms Woolf. Nothing is holding down the soil.

In the Tulare lakebed, the JG Boswell Company has decided not to plant 12,000 acres this season to alfalfa because of water cutbacks – not being pumped from the Delta this year. A combination of water shortages and court rulings to save fish has reduced water pumping south of the Delta along the California Aqueduct.

The cut in alfalfa comes even though this forage crop is in big demand as a dairy ration and is fetching as much as \$280 per ton – almost double what it could be bought for last year. Alfalfa is

a thirsty crop and due to the near-drought conditions in the Valley this year, we are likely to see declining hay supplies.

In Westlands, farmers are taking what water they have this year for their growing acres of permanent crops like almond trees that can't go without water. Woolf says the reallocation of water has increased the acreage of fallow cropland far above levels the district was planning to retire due to selenium or salt problems. Farm land owners get allocated a certain amount of water based on how much land they own. But this year, they are putting their supply on their permanent crops even as field crop acres have dwindled.

This year, Woolf says farmers fear their allocation for the district will be less than promised to date because of pending legal decisions and the lack of snowmelt this spring. To save their new tree crop this summer – more farmland is being left fallow.

Westlands grower Mark Borba thinks it's going to get worse. "It's like a snowball rolling down the hill." He expects even more acreage to go dry next year. This year, Borba cut land planted to cotton from 28,000 acres to just 11,000 acres of pima.

Of course, the fallow land and cropping changes are reducing demand for farm laborers this year creating a dust bowl atmosphere in towns like Huron and Mendota.

The dry spring clearly is exacerbating the situation, says Cindy Bean, meteorologist with the Hanford NWS office. In recent days, the NWS has issued wind warnings when sustained wind speeds of 25 mph were recorded or gusts to 35 mph. "If these fronts coming through were wet, it would have been far different." Instead, she says the systems that have come in have been dry, at least until the past few days.

The unusual conditions in the Valley continued over the Memorial Day weekend as cool unsettled weather patterns were experienced. The strong high pressure system that has brought early hot weather was eclipsed by a strong low pressure bringing sprinkles and even tornados to parts of California.

The dry windy weather has brought with it an increase in concerns over the spread of valley fever – a particular problem in parts of the Valley including Kern County and the Westside. The spread of the disease is worsened by an increase in dust storms that can carry the spores.

This is seen especially around construction sites where dust blows. Experts fear the conversion of farm land to now empty subdivision sites in the Valley may have played a hand in the increase in valley fever as dirt is stirred up. Now, with the home building industry in the doldrums, that amount of empty land earmarked for new homes but no longer being farmed, could add to the inventory of fallow, dry land.

Just this past week, the California Air Resources Board released a study that showed the incidence of premature death from blowing dust – PM 2.5 particles continues upward of 3,000 deaths annually – 7% more than earlier believed. The soot they are talking about comes from trucks, cars, off road equipment, electric power generation, residential wood burning and ag burning, among other sources. While PM 2.5 is down by 30% in the Valley, the Air District is planning tighter restrictions.

But the degree to which the soot is carried by the large PM 10 dust particles from farm land blowing away may be making things worse.

The fear is that a combination of factors similar to what happened in the famous 1930s Dust Bowl era could happen in what is today the nation's salad and fruit bowl – the San Joaquin Valley.

After all, the Dust Bowl was caused by a combination of severe dust storms blowing across acreage not being held down by plants during an extended drought period – in turn forcing thousands of people off the land – packing their bags for the Golden State.

District 1 Candidates Address Issues

By Staff Writer

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, June 2, 2008

Guy Christian, 61, an investigator with the Tulare County District Attorney's office and Allen Ishida, 60, a citrus rancher and incumbent Supervisor, are seeking election as District 1 Supervisor in the June 3 election.

Christian and his wife, Patricia, have four children, Tim, Tammy, Debbie (deceased) and Robby, and 11 surviving grandchildren.

Ishida and wife, Wanda, have three children, Brad, Ken and Barbara.

Below are their responses to questions submitted to them by The Voice.

Guy Christian

What are the three most important issues in District 1?

Reconnecting to our Community: It is important to communicate with the city leaders as well as the citizens in District 1 to build a consensus on development, security issues, economic growth and stability, and to make sure that they know that their voices count. Opening new doors, creating new partnerships and new styles of communication will find the solutions to today's and tomorrow's problems. The County and Cities must reconnect as partners thus strengthening District 1 and the county as a whole.

Just ask any business professional, have your business practices and methods changed over the past 30 years. The answer is a resounding "Yes." County government too should have changed, often times we are still working under outdated policies and procedures that do not reflect the reality of today. The Board of Supervisors must lead the way in this vital change.

Yokohl Valley Project: While the Yokohl Valley project is in its beginning stages, it will be a template for future development not only in District 1, but throughout the county as well. Tulare County has some of the richest agricultural land in the world. It should be obvious that we need to protect it for future generations of farmers and consumers. We also have marginal land, land which is not the best and can only support limited agricultural endeavors.

The Yokohl Valley project will be locating on precisely that type of land. There is no doubt the county's population will continue to increase, it is estimated nearly one million people will live in our county by 2050. The project is designed for a population of 50,000, about 10% of our population increase over the next 40 years. Growth will ultimately be directed into a variety of areas including cities and hamlets within the county over the next 40 years. How we manage this growth is what will define our future.

Regardless, no project can begin without addressing the issues of water, [air quality](#), energy and infrastructure. In the Yokohl Valley, another issue must be addressed, our General Plan requires us to protect our Cultural Resources. Within the Valley itself and the surrounding area are archeological sites and rock art from previous inhabitants of our land. Development of the Valley should include a plan that can preserve and at the same time educate us about those who settled this land before us.

San Joaquin Cross Valley Loop Transmission Project: Recently, Southern California Edison has suggested a route for new power lines, which would cross south of Highway 198 through Lemon Cove, Exeter and Farmersville. This route would change the face of our communities and inhibit growth and future development. Edison has chosen this route citing the least environmental impacts and it is the cheapest for them to build. Unfortunately it is also the route, which affects our communities in ways, which are not always easily detected. The truth is none of us want to live under the "power lines," whether it's a question of they just don't do anything for our view or a question concerning the possible health effects of EMF's.

Edison does have other choices, two alternate routes are available. Either route would affect less people and would also utilize more of Edison's existing right of ways. While the cost is more for these routes the cost is spread out over the life of the towers and lines during their lifetime.

The cost of running the lines along the Highway 198 corridor is much different. The negative effect on growth will change the "lay of the land." The current trend and direction of development in both Exeter and Farmersville will be forever changed. While Edison can put a price tag on today's cost of the alternate routes, we cannot calculate the cost to our communities in new residents, new business or future resources and revenues if the route they have chosen is approved.

What are the three most important issues in Tulare County?

Public Safety: As larger cities throughout the Valley combat today's gangs with stronger tactics, there is a collateral affect. While we read and hear about the success of Fresno and areas of Southern California in the battle to push gangs out, our law enforcement faces new challenges as gang members move into our communities. Our local cities and smaller communities will be on the receiving end as gangs relocate and begin to conduct their terrorism.

The County and cities must work together to solve this problem. Law enforcement, civic leaders, clergy, judicial representatives and the public must work together if we are to win this war in our neighborhoods. It cannot be done alone. In order to take back our neighborhoods, we must use every resource at our disposal.... and our biggest resource is each other.

As a member of the Board of Supervisors, I will not just support the fight against gangs with a vote. I intend to play an active role in providing law enforcement and our district attorney with the support needed to get violent gang members off the street, but provide our district attorney the tools to keep them locked up.

Business development: The development of new business in our community is of vital importance. The first step is determining what types of business will fit our community. Then we must analyze our resources. Our natural resources include the land, water and infrastructure necessary to support business. Our human resources include the available labor force where a variety of skills and education is available. Recreational resources include a variety of activities from movie theaters in town to our own national parks.

New business brings new neighbors, new revenue for local business and opportunities for employment within our communities. Our Board must be the leader in forging new relationships within our county. A relationship where our cities and county can work together to attract and maintain new business. A relationship where new business finds a community that is ready and willing to solve problems and has a commitment to effective support.

The Environment: Water is of vital concern to our county. The development of recharge basins within the county should be expedited. Areas, which provide high permeability for ground water recharge, should be identified and a plan with water districts placed into action for recharge of the underground aquifers.

Conservation alone will not solve our overdraft of the underground water supply. Educational programs for individuals, business and agriculture should be supported in an ongoing commitment to water quality and maintaining our water supply.

In addition, we need to be active in supporting and working in partnership with State, Federal and other counties to expand water storage capacity throughout the state.

Air quality is also a major concern in our valley. While there has been success in some area other areas have not improved. State and Federal agencies have been firm in their stand that we must take measures to improve our air quality. At the same time while pressing us to improve our air quality they have taken little action to develop a plan to reduce particulates, which arise, from State Highway 99 or Interstate 5. It's time to address this issue with our state and federal agencies.

Allen Ishida

Three most important issues facing Tulare County

1-Water is the most important issue facing the future of Tulare County. The San Joaquin River Settlement reduces surface water supplies to Tulare County by approximately 20% until the year 2020. After 2020, if the salmon run restoration is not successful, our water supply from the San Joaquin River will be further reduced. Future population growth and reduced surface water supply will make the building of the Temperance Flat dam a necessity for the economical survival of Tulare County.

Building a new dam will not completely solve our water supply issue. We will also need to plan for additional underground recharge and storage. The County plans to identify areas with the required soil type for water recharge and restrict the development of those lands into urban uses.

The other major water issue is the ability to provide safe drinking water to all of our residents. Many of our unincorporated communities and some cities will not be able to provide safe water without expensive treatment facilities or additional surface water supplies. The Tulare County Water Commission is researching the source of the ground water contamination to find a sustainable solution.

2-Public Safety is the number one priority and responsibility of the Board of Supervisors. The Board took action last year and the Sheriff's Department has reduced its employee turnover rate and has been able to add 14 deputy sheriffs to deal with gang suppression. Tulare County formed the Tulare County Gang Taskforce (Step Up) with the cooperation of all the county's law enforcement agencies, parents, editors, business leaders, churches, non-profit organizations and concerned residents to actively address gang suppression, intervention and prevention.

The Tulare County Fire Department took over fire responsibilities for Cal Fire on July 1, 2007. The department has been able to re-staff three fire stations and purchase four new fire engines. The transfer of responsibility was virtually seamless and saved the county money.

3-The General Plan update will determine the future population growth opportunities. The county General Plan update will give our unincorporated communities an opportunity to grow. The update will not direct growth to the incorporated cities nor to the unincorporated communities but will allow our residents (the market) a choice of where they want to live. The current Board of Supervisors prefers our rural life style and will work to prevent Tulare County from becoming a metropolitan county.

The Three Most Important Issues Facing District 1

1-Water is the most important long-term issue in District 1. The loss of 20% of our surface water from the San Joaquin River Settlement will directly impact many of our communities and farmers.

The City of Lindsay, Tonyville and Strathmore are 100% dependent on surface water from the San Joaquin River. Many of our citrus growers in District 1 are totally dependent on surface water. The underground water of most of the unincorporated communities in District 1 has unsafe nitrate levels, higher than state water quality standards.

The Board re-established the Tulare County Water Commission to find solutions for our ground water quality problems and to find a sustainable solution to provide safe drinking water to our residents.

The Board, during the last three years, has been lobbying the federal government to mitigate the loss of water from the San Joaquin River Settlement and for the construction of the Temperance Flat Dam. We have also been lobbying the state for grant funding to study and implement water projects for disadvantaged communities.

2-The proposed new electric transmission line from Lemon Cove south of Highway 198 through the City of Farmersville and near Exeter is a major issue in District 1. The proposed route will affect more than 150 landowners and disrupt many farming operations. The most devastating effect on District 1 will be in the City of Farmersville. The route will go through the center of Farmersville planned commercial and industrial expansion.

A citizens' steering committee steering committee has been formed to oppose the proposed Southern California Edison Route 1 and re-route the transmission line to Route 3 (Stokes Mountain).

3-The abandonment of the San Joaquin Valley Railroad from south of Ducor to Fresno will limit future industrial growth in District 1. The loss of the rail service would force Lindsay Foods, Inc. to relocate and close their Lindsay facility.

The high cost of fuel and the passage of the California State Assembly Bill 32 will make rail service an attractive way to move goods. We may again see citrus and other fruits shipped by rail.

Any reduction of truck traffic to move goods will improve our air quality.

Merced City Council holds hearing on garbage rate hike

By Leslie Albrecht

Merced Sun-Star, Monday, June 2, 2008

Merced residents who think a city plan to hike garbage bills is, well, garbage, will get a chance to say so at Monday night's City Council meeting.

The council will hold a public hearing on a proposal to raise garbage collection fees by 8 percent to \$26.41 from \$24.71 a month for single-family homes.

If the council OKs the proposed fee hike, bills will go up starting in July. Garbage customers would see subsequent yearly increases for the next four years. By 2012, residential customers would be paying \$31.21 a month.

Public Works Solid Waste manager Stan Murdock says spiking fuel, labor and equipment costs are driving the possible rate increase.

For example, since the council last raised garbage bills in 2002, fuel costs have risen about 170 percent, said Murdock.

The city is also paying more for both garbage trucks and the people who drive them. Recently approved union contracts guarantee a pay raise for public works employees every January until 2010, said Murdock.

New regulations mandated by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District mean the city must outfit its trucks with special devices that trap toxins and make exhaust cleaner. The contraptions mean cleaner air, but they add about \$15,000 to the cost of each vehicle.

Some customers have questioned whether the fee hike could be avoided. Could the city contract with a private company like the county does, or make fewer pickups? What about charging less to customers who produce less trash?

Under the proposed fee increase, city customers would pay slightly more than county residents whose trash is collected by Waste Management. But city customers would also get more for their dollar, said Murdock. For \$1.65 more, the city would provide extra services such as street sweeping, leaf collection and the annual spring cleanup.

As for the idea of reducing costs by making fewer pickups, city staff doesn't recommend it, said Murdock. It's against state code to collect trash every other week, he said. 9

Less frequent pickups for recycling aren't practical, he said, "because there are lots and lots of really avid recyclers in Merced who set that container out full every week."

Using smaller containers for households that produce smaller amounts of garbage isn't a great idea either, said Murdock, because it would require switching out equipment on refuse trucks -- a move that would cut down on efficiency.

"We think the loss in efficiency would offset any gains that we might see," he said.

Battle for the board

Eleven county supervisor candidates vying for seats

By Ross Farrow - News-Sentinel Staff Writer
Lodi News Sentinel, Saturday, May 31, 2008

While Ken Vogel has two more years on his term representing the Lodi area on the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors, three other seats are up for grabs in the June 3 primary.

Two are open seats, with Supervisors Steve Gutierrez and Victor Mow stepping down due to term limits at the end of the year. Supervisors are restricted to two four-year terms. Additionally, incumbent Leroy Ornellas of Tracy is being challenged by Tom Benigno.

It's a wide-open field in two districts, with five candidates battling for the District 1 seat and four candidates going for a seat in District 3. The two top vote-getters on June 3 will compete for the seat in November unless someone gets more than 50 percent of the vote.

In District 5, where only Ornellas and Benigno are competing, that election will be settled in June.

Voters in the Lodi area will not be casting ballots in the three supervisor seats up for grabs this year, but actions by all five supervisors will affect all portions of the county.

District 1

(Central and south Stockton, and French Camp)

Steve Gutierrez terms out

Sandra Carter

Age: 62

Residence: Stockton her entire life.

Occupation: Retired communications technician from Pacific Bell. Now a part-time secretary/treasurer with Communication Workers of America.

Family: Single.

Carter has served on the San Joaquin County Planning Commission for almost 23 years. She chose to seek a Board of Supervisors seat because it's an open seat.

Major issues Carter cites include finding a way to avoid cost overruns at San Joaquin General Hospital, enticing more companies to relocate into the county and provide good-paying jobs, providing affordable housing, preserving prime agricultural land and keeping new homes away from Stockton Metropolitan Airport so that the airport can reach its fullest potential.

Carter is president of the Democratic Women Club of San Joaquin County and formerly served on the county's Democratic Central Committee. She was also a delegate for presidential candidate Jerry Brown in 1992.

Beverly A. Foster

Age: 54

Residence: Stockton her entire life.

Occupation: Kennedy Community Center director, a county social services agency.

Family: Husband, the Rev. Eddie C. Foster, three adult children, three grandchildren.

Foster knows what it's like to seek public office. She has served on the San Joaquin County Board of Education for 18 years and ran for the Stockton City Council against Susan Eggman in 2006.

Although she describes herself as colorblind when it comes to the community, Foster noted that the Board of Supervisors has had only one woman on the board in county history and no black people.

Foster said she wants to enhance services to the eight county-run community centers for low-income people. There is one community center in Lodi, one in Thornton, one in Tracy and five in Stockton.

Another major issue Foster cited is to restore fiscal stability to San Joaquin General Hospital by finding out why private doctors don't refer their patients to the county-run hospital.

Gary S. Giovanetti

Age: 59

Residence: Stockton entire life except for a few years in San Jose.

Occupation: Independent insurance broker.

Family: Married 23 years, three grown sons.

Giovanetti served eight years on the Stockton City Council before being termed out in 2006. He previously served four years on the Stockton Planning Commission.

Giovanetti cites his City Council and Planning Commission service as assets he can take to the Board of Supervisors, along with licenses he holds as a general contractor and architect, and in life and health insurance, securities, mutual funds and annuities.

Having walked about 75 percent of District 1, Giovanetti said the top issues cited by residents are crime, gangs, violence and graffiti. He suggests considering a sales tax increase and asking cities to help financially to operate a proposed new county jail, programs for inmates who want to change their lives and for the county to provide after-school programs, athletics and tutoring.

Anthony R. Silva

Age: 33

Residence: Stockton entire life except for two years in Lodi.

Occupation: President and CEO of Boys and Girls Club of Stockton; formerly coordinated the aquatics center at Hutchins Street Square in Lodi for two-and-a-half years.

Family: Son, 3.

Silva said he expects Supervisors Ken Vogel, Larry Ruhstaller and Leroy Ornellas to provide municipal experience to the Board of Supervisors, with Silva bringing youthful exuberance and motivation to the board.

"Jobs, jobs, jobs are my big thing." Silva said.

More jobs brings less crime, he added.

Silva also pledges to work with the city of Stockton to improve neglected streets in south and east Stockton, which would entice more business to locate there.

Silva is in his fourth year on the Stockton Unified School District board, including two years as president. This year, he'll be hiring the district's third superintendent since he's been on the board.

"I learned a lot supervising people making more than \$200,000 a year," he said.

Carlos Villapudua

Age: 40

Residence: Stockton his entire life.

Occupation: Chief of staff or San Joaquin County Supervisor Steve Gutierrez.

Family: Single, one daughter.

Issues include solving the fiscal woes at San Joaquin General Hospital, job creation by marketing the county better, creating more jobs at Stockton Metropolitan Airport and cleaning up the streets to attract those jobs, and preventing the county's water from being shipped to Southern California.

Villapudua also advocates the county provide after-school programs such as performing arts for youth in conjunction with the cities and school districts.

District 3

Includes north and west Stockton, Lathrop, north Manteca and much of the Delta.

Victor Mow to terms out.

Steve J. Bestolarides

Age: 52

Residence: Stockton since 1986; born and raised in Lodi, attended Senior Elementary, Lodi High and Tokay High.

Occupation: Retired banker; currently general manager of a Harley Davidson franchise in Stockton.

Family: Wife Doreen, two teenage sons.

Bestolarides is serving his second term on the Stockton City Council. His term ends in 2010. He previously served eight years on the Stockton Planning Commission.

He advocates improving operations at the financially struggling San Joaquin General Hospital, grudgingly seeking a tax increase to finance operation of a larger county jail, asking cities to contribute to the jail operation and establishing training programs for inmates to reduce their chances of returning to jail.

Bestolarides also cites flood protection for Stockton and Lathrop, along with promoting industrial

development, not housing, around Stockton Metropolitan Airport.

Sandra K. Davis

Age: 53

Residence: Stockton since 1986.

Occupation: Retired in 2007 as senior deputy director of San Joaquin General Hospital.

Family: Three grown children, one grandchild.

"My primary platform is health care, and public safety is my second," Davis said.

Considering that the fiscal crisis and operations at San Joaquin General Hospital is one of the county's most difficult issues to tackle, Davis said she can fill a gap on the present Board of Supervisors, none of whom have a health-care background with an understanding of medical policies.

The county needs to advocate with state and federal authorities about reimbursing the county in a timely manner to cover Medi-Cal patients, marketing the hospital's availability for low-income patients, sign up eligible people and reduce paperwork.

Davis also advocates social programs to deter people from crime.

Albert E. Garibaldi

Age: 36

Residence: Stockton. Grew up on Roberts Island in the Delta.

Occupation: Assistant superintendent for eight years in the Banta School district between Lathrop and Manteca.

Family: Wife Julie, two children, ages 5 and 2.

Garibaldi says the county needs new leadership. He says the Board of Supervisors need to get all the players to the table to solve San Joaquin General Hospital's fiscal crisis. That includes the Board of Supervisors, representatives of the seven cities within the county, other hospitals and the doctors and nurses associations. They need to hammer out together a plan for funding and services for San Joaquin General, he said.

Garibaldi said he will also push for youth programs to combat crime and graffiti, fixing Delta levees, giving incentives for businesses to relocate to the county, air pollution and fighting the proposed diversion of Delta waters to Southern California.

Nancy Goad

Age: Undisclosed.

Residence: Stockton more than 20 years.

Occupation: School psychologist for Tracy Unified School District; licensed educational psychologist in private practice. Previously worked for Lodi Unified School District.

Family: Three grown sons, one grown daughter.

Goad said that Sheriff Steve Moore has done a good job, but there needs to be better coordination between city and county law enforcement agencies, she said.

Goad also supports each hospital in the county to have its own specialty, which she said would improve health care throughout the county.

She also opposes housing construction near Stockton Metropolitan Airport, on greenbelts that would be landscaped with bicycle paths for residents to use.

To tackle levee and groundwater issues, Goad said she supports State Sen. Mike Machado's idea of establishing a unifying water agency instead of having a system in which the county, cities and small water districts operate independently.

District 5

Tracy, Ripon, Mountain House, half of Manteca and a portion of Lathrop.

Thomas Benigno

Age: 72

Residence: Tracy. Previously lived in Stockton, Escalon and Danville.

Occupation: Farmed in the county more than 50 years. Previously owned supermarket in Dublin and hosted the "Citizens' Voice" program on Comcast. He's on hiatus from hosting the program because he is running for office.

Family: Wife Joyce; three children, six grandchildren.

Benigno is virtually a lifelong campaigner, though he has lost all his elections except for a seat on the Republican Central Committee in 2002. He ran for an Assembly seat in 2000, Congress in 2002 and 2006, governor during the 2003 recall election against Gray Davis, and mayor of Tracy in 2004.

Benigno said he is running for Board of Supervisors because incumbent Leroy Ornellas reportedly stated that he wanted someone to run against him.

Benigno bucks the trend by supporting construction of Peripheral Canal to export Delta water to Southern California as a means to generate "millions of dollars and thousands of jobs."

Leroy Ornellas

Age: 64

Residence: Tracy.

Occupation: Member, San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors; dairy farmer.

Family: Wife Jennie, three sons, four grandchildren.

Ornellas' family has farmed in the Tracy area since the 1930s. He was elected to the Board of Supervisors in 2002 [and chairs the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#). He also sits on the Sutter/Tracy Community Hospital, California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley and the Port to Port Coalition.

He also served several years on the county Agricultural Advisory Board and was named agriculturist of the year in 1995 by the city of Tracy and the Tracy Chamber of Commerce.

Ornellas said the Board of Supervisors needs to bird dog San Joaquin General Hospital's finances, work with other counties on water issues, and find a way to finance operation of a new jail so that inmates won't be released early due to overcrowding.

Controlled burns invite disaster

By John Woolfolk, MediaNews

Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, June 1, 2008

In the densely wooded Santa Cruz Mountains, where a wildfire last week torched 4,270 acres and 31 homes, the notion of deliberately burning brush to get rid of it strikes some as an invitation to disaster.

But it happens every winter and spring, with local fire officials signing off on dozens of debris-burning permits and trusting property owners to control the flames.

It may be weeks before fire officials say what sparked the Summit fire, Santa Cruz County's largest in a century. But the possibility that debris burning ignited the blaze, which fire investigators have not ruled out, has left some residents questioning oversight and regulation of the long-standing practice, which ironically aims to cut down on fire risk by clearing away excess fuel.

"This is just insane," said Rene Rylander, who has lived on Old Santa Cruz Highway near the summit in Los Gatos for 20 years. "I just find it really hard to believe the fire department, given the severity and potential impact burning can have, is still issuing permits."

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection cut the open burning season in Santa Cruz County two weeks short in April after about 30 debris fires — at least a half-dozen of them in the mountains — "escaped" and ignited surrounding brush dried by a rainless spring. One of those scorched 3 acres before it was extinguished.

On the Santa Clara County side of Summit Road, a man who owns acreage in the area where fire officials believe last week's wildfire started acknowledged he was burning brush there seven weeks earlier. He said he had a permit.

Cal Fire officials would not confirm that or open their records to inspection, saying they require a formal Public Records Act request through their Sacramento headquarters. They have yet to respond to such a request made by MediaNews last week; the act requires a response within 10 days.

Brush-burning regulations vary in the Santa Cruz Mountains because two counties and two air quality districts collide at Summit Road.

On the Santa Cruz County side to the south, where the slopes are bathed in cool, foggy ocean breezes and thick with redwood groves with moist fern undergrowth, property owners can generally burn small brush piles from December through April. Firefighters have long considered the wildfire risk so low on the damp hillsides that they dubbed the Santa Cruz region "Asbestos County."

Because the sea breezes tend to disperse pollution before it becomes a health hazard, the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District does not forbid backyard debris burning, although some cities do, and fire officials have authority to suspend it for safety reasons.

Residents who want to burn a small pile of brush during the wet season need only fill out a one-page form at the local fire station with their name, address and location of the proposed burn. The person doing the burning must stand by with a shovel and hose and may be held liable for firefighting costs if the flames get out of control.

The Santa Clara County side of the mountains falls under Bay Area Air Quality Management District regulations, which generally prohibit open burning. Because of that, a number of debris-chipping programs are available to mountain residents above Los Gatos so they can dispose of brush that poses a wildfire hazard without burning it. FireSafe Councils, nonprofits established by Cal Fire that operate on federal grants, offer the service for free.

But the air district's 10 pages of open-burning regulations do allow burning under some conditions. Commercial agricultural operations, including vineyards, may obtain permits to burn brush. Property owners also may obtain a permit to burn brush that poses a wildfire hazard if it is a substantial amount — more than 5 cubic yards — and there are no other practical means of disposing it.

The air district allows burning only on specified days when atmospheric conditions allow for dispersal of the smoke, and the district requires notification by the permit holder. District officials would not say whether they were notified of any burning in the summit area this year, insisting first on a formal public records request, which they have yet to answer.

Andrew Napell, who owns land in the area where firefighters believe the Summit fire started, said that he had a permit to burn. "All land clearing and hazard-reduction fire activity on my Mount Madonna property ceased on April 4," he said, adding that he is working with "arson investigators" and had been told not to comment further.

Neighbors have suspected that dry, gusty northeasterly winds that howled across the summit before dawn May 22 somehow stirred up embers smoldering from the debris burn almost two months earlier and ignited the wildfire.

Fire officials won't comment on that or any of the other theories wafting like smoke in the aftermath of the wildfire. The stakes are high, with the costs of fighting the fire estimated at \$12.2 million, and a premature statement could jeopardize the case. For now, they'll say only that the cause remains under investigation.

But fire officials said it's not inconceivable that embers from a debris burn could smolder for weeks. Although they declared the wildfire fully controlled Friday, they also expect spots within its perimeter to remain hot; firefighters will be standing watch throughout the summer to douse any flare-ups.

Fire officials say debris burning has not historically been a problem.

"We issue thousands of burn permits on an annual basis," Capt. Matt Streck of Cal Fire in Santa Clara County said. "The vast majority of the burning is safe. My experience has been that if people follow the rules they agree to on their permit, we don't have problems."

He and other fire officials said debris chipping can be costly and inconvenient for some, and impractical in some remote areas. The Santa Clara County FireSafe Council's chipping program, for instance, costs \$100,000 a year and is paid for by grants.

But Streck acknowledged that "it's not unusual at the beginning of fire season to have a couple of escaped debris burns."

The conflicting jurisdictional rules at the summit also create some tension among residents.

"Right across the street on Summit Road, they can burn, and they do it constantly because they're on the Santa Cruz side," said Mona Raby, office manager of the Redwood Estates Services Association, which runs a debris chipping program for residents. "They'll burn right across the street from a forest, and there's nothing we can do about it."

Alex Leman, chief of the Loma Prieta Fire and Rescue volunteer fire unit, which straddles the county line, said he hasn't yet detected a groundswell among mountain residents for reconsidering debris-burning rules, because many appreciate the convenience.

"But that may change after this week," Leman said.

New UC buildings approved despite protests

By Doug Oakley, Staff writer

Contra Costa Times, Monday, June 2, 2008

BERKELEY—Over objections by the city of Berkeley and a new group called Save Strawberry Canyon, a University of California regents committee approved two new UC Berkeley building projects valued at about \$311 million.

"It's an environmental disaster for that area," said Betty Olds, a Berkeley city councilwoman. "The saddest thing is here you have the UC regents, who are supposed to be outstanding people

mentally, but anyone can understand you don't put those buildings in a canyon right next to an earthquake fault."

Olds is referring to the Hayward Fault, which runs along the base of the Berkeley hills near both projects.

Olds said she "would sure think long and hard" about introducing a measure at a City Council meeting to sue the regents over the projects, based on aesthetic, environmental and safety objections. Berkeley Planning Director Dan Marks raised the possibility of a lawsuit over the project in a report to the council earlier this month.

The UC regents' Committee on Grounds and Buildings voted 6-0 Tuesday to approve design and environmental review studies for the Helios Energy Research Facility and the Computational Research and Theory Facility, both on the grounds of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory.

The two buildings are slated for separate areas on lab grounds at UC Berkeley, but both would denigrate the natural environment and pose major problems in the event of a fire or earthquake, opponents say.

The 144,000-square-foot energy research building, which is part of a new Energy Biosciences Institute, is in the Berkeley hills in Strawberry Canyon off of Centennial Road and about a mile above the campus. The completion date is October 2011. The 126,000 square-foot computer building is near the mouth of Strawberry Canyon at the end of Hearst Avenue. Completion is anticipated in May 2011.

Lynn Yarris, a spokesman for the lab, said in a statement that the planning process for the buildings included the community.

"The lab worked collaboratively with the city of Berkeley and members of the public and acted on many of their comments and recommendations. These changes include a 42 percent reduction to the overall height of the (computer building), and the relocation of the Helios access road to preserve a number of mature redwood trees."

He said the two buildings are critical for research into reducing carbon emissions.

Former Berkeley Mayor Shirley Dean, who is a member of Save Strawberry Canyon, a group of about 200 formed to fight the two projects, said a new road leading to the energy building off of Centennial Drive will require cutting down trees, increased traffic will cause air pollution, and the area is prone to fires, earthquakes and landslides.

"Do it in a place that doesn't degrade the environment," Dean said. "We're extremely disappointed with the regents. And the lineup of people who have expressed concern is really astounding."

Marks said he has "major reservations" about both projects.

"It's the size, character, location and technical issues on both of them," Marks said. "They didn't do a good job evaluating the aesthetic impacts on the canyon. Certainly the option (of suing the regents) is there given the adequacy of their environmental impact report."

Marks said a new road cut into the hillside for the energy building will have three-story retaining walls, which will contribute to the canyon losing its charm.

Sylvia McLaughlin, also a member of Save Strawberry Canyon and a co-founder of Save the Bay, said she spoke against the project before the regents committee on Tuesday, but it did little good.

"If you visualize these huge buildings, it will not enhance the natural qualities of the canyon," McLaughlin said. "We just think it's a really inappropriate site, and there are other places it could be."

As gas prices climb, L.A. starts to change

By Sue Doyle, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Monday, June 2, 2008

Gasoline consumption is dropping. Angelenos are driving less. Once traffic-choked freeways are slowly thinning out. And all that was even before prices at the pump topped a stomach-dropping \$4 a gallon.

It's still too soon to tell whether these are short-term ripple effects in response to the staggering prices or the start of larger, long-term changes in a city madly in love with cars.

But if prices at the pump continue to soar, Los Angeles could eventually undergo profound changes that would reshape the region into more community-friendly neighborhoods emphasizing mass transit, walking and biking.

"If we got to \$10 for a gallon of gas and that becomes normal, what we're going to see is an alteration in our car culture," said James David Ballard, California State University, Northridge, sociology professor. "We're going to see real changes in the long term if prices stay high."

But some wonder if it even needs to reach \$10 to spark the tipping point for a transportation revolution in Los Angeles.

As average statewide gas prices hit \$4.16 a gallon last week - up 22 percent from last year - state officials note driving already has dropped this year by 1.5 percent.

That means Californians this year have traveled 1 billion fewer miles than in 2007, according to Caltrans. And the popular summer driving season is expected to see a 1 percent drop in gas consumption - the first decline in 17 years at a time when gas use typically soars, according to federal energy officials.

While painful to consumers' pocketbooks, if gas prices propel such trends for any length of time, experts say it could boost everything from regional air quality to national security.

"As we start to wean ourselves off petroleum, it makes us less dependent on Iraq, Iran and Venezuela - people who hate us," said John Husing, an Inland Empire economist. "In the long run, the short-term pain has some national consequences that are positive."

Already, some motorists report seeing fewer vehicles on the roads, shaving minutes off lengthy commutes and saving the region some of the \$12 billion annually siphoned out of the economy because of traffic.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky said it took him 35 minutes to go from the Fairfax District to a meeting in Warner Center on a recent morning - less than half the time it normally takes in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

Ironically, the Woodland Hills meeting was to discuss traffic congestion and road-clearing solutions. But Yaroslavsky said \$4-a-gallon gasoline already appears to be unclogging roads.

"We have congestion pricing right now," he said. "It's called OPEC."

But while gleeful about fewer cars during the commute from her Stanton home to her cashier job in Canoga Park, May Heng also fears what will happen if gas prices pass \$5.

"I'd quit this job or move (to the Valley)," said Heng, 32, who spends up to \$20 a day on gas. "I could not do it."

And Heng is not alone, as residents who live in far-flung areas and commute to work in the city are now considering moving closer to their jobs. In the long term, soaring gas prices could crimp the once powerful new housing markets in outlying areas of the Antelope Valley, Victorville and Beaumont, Husing said.

"At the same time, companies that aren't close to their employees are going to be in a position where people want to get away from them," he said. "People may be more willing to earn less money if that means staying closer to home."

With his wife expecting their first child, Eliceo Herrera, 33, of Sylmar wants to tuck away some of the money he spends on his 96-mile daily commute. He recently put an ad on craigslist.com to carpool to Long Beach, where he works as a computer teacher.

"I have thought about changing school districts, to work closer to home, but basically I would end up giving up a big chunk of my salary," said Herrera, who takes a two-hour Commuter Express bus ride to work once a week to save on gas money. "Once the baby is born, I will reconsider."

Russell Riggs with the National Association of Realtors, said it will take substantial changes - \$7 or \$8 a gallon for 10 years or more - before a dramatic shift occurs.

"The suburbia that we know of and think of today is a product of 30 or 40 years," he said. "And it wasn't one dramatic factor, such as gas prices, that caused the suburbs to be built. It was a combination of factors over the long term, and that's how societies shift."

Quietly however, some new home seekers are already pushing to live near major transportation lines - a perk smart-growth developers are capitalizing on.

Selling condos last year at the Mission Meridian Village next to the Gold Line - which runs from Pasadena to downtown L.A. - broker Dominic deFazio first thought South Pasadena's strong schools would be a key for the project.

But a survey of the new homeowners revealed that 55 percent bought condos because they are across from the Gold Line, deFazio said.

"It was the proximity to the Gold Line and that they could leave their cars at home and buzz almost anywhere because of the station," he said.

Despite the Southland housing slowdown, the 67 condos in that project - and another with 39 units near the Gold Line - sold last year, he said.

Metro has more than 30 transit-oriented efforts in the works along its rail lines and two adjacent to the Orange Line, said Roger Moliere, chief of real property management and development.

"People will move and have their choice of residence be based on public transportation available," he said. "If you have one less car, that's \$6,000 after-tax money that you still have in your pocket."

Others are making smaller changes. When prices at the pump hit \$3.70 about six weeks ago, Neal Moore, 38, of Pasadena began carpooling to his job in Woodland Hills twice a week with a colleague.

"Carpooling is definitely one thing I'm doing," he said. "If it gets really bad, I'll consider public transportation."

Ridership has ticked up over the last year on Metro's rail system - with the Red, Blue and Green Lines seeing at least 1,000 more riders each day during the week. Ridership on the Gold Line has surged, with 3,500 more passengers each day than in 2007.

Still, if more Angelenos rush to public transportation - or even to walk and bike more - it would take decades to accommodate the needed infrastructure changes, said Paul Mason Fotsch, a CSUN communications professor and author of "Watching the Traffic go by: Transportation and Isolation in Urban America."

"It's going to take a long time before U.S. cities can rebuild themselves to make it comfortable to take public transit and walk," he said. "People are desirous of an alternative now. They are seeing the contradictions and problems that designing cities around the automobile has created."

Although it would take billions of dollars to dig subways and redesign infrastructure, Fotsch said simpler fixes include dedicating bus lanes.

Though that idea is often met with resistance from motorists, Los Angeles transportation officials are considering a bus-only lane for Wilshire Boulevard - an idea supported by the Bus Riders Union.

Some experts also wonder if long-term implications of high gas prices could break down the vastness of Los Angeles.

"It could be `back to the future,'" said Jack Kyser, chief economist at the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp. The region should return to the Red Cars - electric streetcars that linked the area's five counties from the 1920s to the '60s, he said.

"Here we are in the center of intellectual capital, but we don't anticipate the future very well," Kyser said. "Everything is always the most convenient thing."

Fire at Universal Studios destroys sets, videos

By GREG RISLING

Washington Post, Monday, June 2, 2008

UNIVERSAL CITY, Calif. -- One of Hollywood's largest movie studios starred in a disastrous sequel Sunday as a fire ripped through a lot at Universal Studios, destroying a set from "Back to the Future," a King Kong exhibit and a streetscape seen frequently in movies and TV shows.

It was the second fire at the historic site in nearly two decades, leveling facades, hollowing out buildings and creating the kind of catastrophe filmmakers relish re-creating. This time around, thousands of videos chronicling Universal's movie and TV shows were destroyed in the blaze.

But Universal officials said that they were thankful no visitors were seriously injured _ though several firefighters suffered minor injuries _ and that the damaged footage can be replaced.

"We have duplicates of everything," said Ron Meyer, NBC Universal president and chief operating officer. "Nothing is lost forever."

The blaze broke out on a sound stage featuring New York brownstone facades around 4:30 a.m. at the 400-acre property, Los Angeles County Fire Chief Michael Freeman said. The fire was contained to the lot but burned for more than 12 hours before the final flames were extinguished.

The cause of the fire is under investigation. Damage was expected to be in the millions of dollars.

The iconic courthouse square from "Back to the Future" was destroyed, and the famous clock tower that enabled Michael J. Fox's character to travel through time was damaged, fire officials said. Two mock New York and New England streets used both for movie-making and as tourist displays were a total loss, Los Angeles County Fire Inspector Darryl Jacobs said.

An exhibit housing a mechanically animated King Kong that bellows at visitors on a tram also was destroyed.

All three sites were either damaged or destroyed during another fire at Universal Studios in November 1990. That fire caused \$25 million in damage and was started by a security guard who was sentenced to four years in prison after pleading guilty to arson.

Concerns for air quality due to the acrid smoke prompted the South Coast Air Quality Management District to send a chemist to take air samples at the scene, said spokesman Sam Atwood. Results were expected Monday morning.

Hundreds of visitors who had waited for hours outside the park gates were turned away after officials decided not to open the area. On a typical weekend day, about 25,000 people visit Universal Studios. NBC Universal said in a statement that the park would reopen Monday morning.

Universal CityWalk, a shopping promenade, was also closed. The MTV Movie Awards, broadcasting live Sunday night from the adjacent Gibson Amphitheater, went on as planned.

Mike Herrick of San Diego watched the fire on television from his hotel Sunday afternoon before deciding to return to Universal Studios for a second day with his wife.

"By gosh, we're going to go and get whatever we can out of it," Herrick said. On Saturday, Herrick had ridden the tram that winds around the studio lot, snapping photos of the King Kong attraction, among other sights.

The fire broke out along New York Street, where firefighting helicopters swept in for drops and cranes dumped water on the flames. A thick column of smoke rose thousands of feet into the air and could be seen for miles.

"It looked like a disaster film," said Los Angeles City Councilman Tom LaBonge.

Several firefighters suffered minor injuries. One firefighter and a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy were slightly hurt when a pressurized cylinder exploded inside the building housing the videos.

The streetscape that burned recently served as a backdrop in such films as "Bruce Almighty" and television shows including "Monk," "Crossing Jordan" and "House," said NBC Universal spokeswoman Cindy Gardner. A set for the Clint Eastwood-directed movie "Changeling" featuring Angelina Jolie also was destroyed, Meyer said.

At one point the blaze was two city blocks wide, and low water pressure forced firefighters to get reserves from lakes and ponds on the property. "The water pressure situation was a challenge," Freeman said. "This fire moved extremely fast."

County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky said authorities would investigate the water problems to see if they reflect a larger shortfall in the area, which is part of his district.

"There's no question that there was a lack of adequate water pressure at least in the perception of a lot of firefighters," he said. "We're going to find out what the problem was."

Meyer estimated there were 40,000 to 50,000 videos and film reels in a vault that burned but said duplicates were stored in a different location. Firefighters managed to recover hundreds of titles.

The videos included every film that Universal has produced and footage from television series including "Miami Vice" and "I Love Lucy."

Universal Studios, nine miles north of downtown Los Angeles, has thrill rides and a back lot where movies and television shows are filmed, including scenes from "War of the Worlds," "When Harry Met Sally" and "Scrubs."

Boxer promotes bill limiting emissions She says legislation would create jobs, reduce pollution

Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, June 1, 2008

Washington -- California Sen. Barbara Boxer, the Democratic head of the Senate's environment committee, sought Saturday to drum up support for legislation dealing with "one of the most important issues of our time," global warming.

"There are some in the Senate who insist that global warming is nothing more than science fiction," Boxer said in the Democrats' weekly radio address. "The fact is that the overwhelming majority of scientists say that the Earth is in peril if we don't act now."

Boxer disputed industry claims that proposed limits on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions pose risks to the economy. The legislation "will create millions of new jobs and put us on the path to energy independence," she said.

The Senate is scheduled to begin considering the bill on Monday.

Boxer appealed for the Bush administration "to help us, not fight us" over the legislation, which would reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds over the next 42 years. Carbon dioxide, from burning fossil fuels, is the leading pollutant linked to climate change.

President Bush opposes legislation that would mandate greenhouse gas limits, arguing that global warming can be addressed through voluntary actions and technological innovations.

Boxer, chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, noted that the bill has bipartisan support. Still, while one of the bill's original authors is Sen. John Warner, R-Va., many Republicans oppose it. They say it would put too great an economic burden on carbon-intensive industries such as electric utilities, which would pass on costs to consumers.

Ore. AG joins suit against feds over new smog rules

Associated Press

Capital Press Ag Weekly, Saturday May 31, 2008

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) -- Oregon has joined 13 other states in a lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that claims the Bush administration failed to protect public health and the environment when it issued new smog requirements.

The lawsuit was filed earlier this week in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, at the same time that environmental and conservation groups filed a parallel lawsuit with that court.

Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers says White House officials took an active role in making one of the air pollution standards far weaker than scientifically recommended levels.

The District of Columbia and the city of New York are also part of the lawsuit filed on Tuesday.

Oregon officials announced Friday the state had joined the complaint.

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Regulators: Four Corners could exceed air pollution levels

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Sunday, June 1, 2008

DURANGO, Colo.—Coal-fired power plants and other pollution sources in the Four Corners area could boost smog levels past federal limits in New Mexico and southwest Colorado this summer, government officials and environment and health care managers warn.

Mesa Verde National Park near Cortez could exceed federal air-quality standards, said participants at an air-quality forum at Fort Lewis College last week.

"Very serious air-quality issues need to be addressed, particularly ozone," said Mary Uhl, air quality division bureau chief at the New Mexico Environment Department.

She said San Juan County in northwest New Mexico might violate federal standards this summer, and southwest Colorado might, too. Uhl added that Mesa Verde might also be out of compliance if it's a bad summer.

Ground-level ozone, a key component of smog, is created when the sun bakes pollutants such as vehicle exhaust, wildfire smoke and vapors from everything from paint cans to oil and gas wells. The Environmental Protection Agency in March tightened the ozone limit to 75 parts per billion, down from the maximum concentration of 80 to 84 parts per billion.

Even before the new standard, a nine-county area along Colorado's Front Range, including the Denver area, was declared in violation of the ozone standard. State regulators have imposed more stringent rules on the oil and gas industry to help cut pollution.

Uhl noted that the Four Corners area is home to two coal-fired power plants, with another one proposed, and 19,000 oil and gas wells, with 12,000 more projected over the next 20 years.

Other air-quality problems in the area are haze, mercury and nitrate pollution, Uhl said.

She said the region contains seven Class 1 sites, generally national parks or wilderness areas, where the air quality is supposed to be better than in other areas.

Information from: Durango Herald, <http://www.durangoherald.com>

Delaware refinery likely exempt from pollution plan

By Randall Chase, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Monday, June 02, 2008

DOVER, Del.—Delaware's participation in the nation's first regional effort to control greenhouse gas emissions through a cap-and-trade system probably won't include one of the state's biggest polluters.

Valero Energy Corp.'s oil refinery in Delaware City accounts for more than one-fifth of all carbon dioxide emissions in the state, but environmental officials plan to include an exemption for the refinery in Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative regulations for Delaware.

The RGGI is a 10-state effort to reduce by 10 percent emissions of carbon dioxide, the heat-trapping gas most blamed for global warming, from power plants in the Northeast by 2018.

Environmentalists contend the decision by the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control to exempt the Delaware refinery from the program is a mistake.

"The fact of the matter is, this is a hell of a large carbon emitter," Chad Tolman of the Sierra Club's state chapter said during a recent meeting of a workgroup developing Delaware's RGGI rules.

According to DNREC, the refinery's six electrical generating units emitted more than 1.7 million tons of CO₂ in 2006. State officials argue the refinery should be exempt from RGGI because the program is aimed at electric utilities—not businesses that generate their own electricity.

"It was our expressed goal not to capture industrial facilities that might be generating their own power," said Phil Cherry, DNREC's policy and planning director.

Under RGGI—which includes Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont—state governments would cap the amount of carbon dioxide that power plants are allowed to discharge annually. Electricity generators would have to obtain an allowance for each ton of CO₂ emitted, with excess allowances sold at a profit on the secondary market.

Delaware's annual emissions cap is set at 7.5 million tons for 2009 through 2014. The cap would gradually decrease each year after that until 2018, when it would be 6.8 million tons.

Cherry said other states also have allowed exemptions for industrial power generators, although only a handful of facilities in the region would be eligible.

The coke-fired generators owned San Antonio-based Valero provide power mostly for refinery operations, although some excess is sold to the regional power grid. Under the proposed regulations, the refinery would be exempt from RGGI as long as it sells no more than 10 percent of its electricity to the grid. In each of the past two years, it has sold less than 2 percent to the grid.

In return, the refinery would have to document its energy generation and submit a "climate action plan." While rules have yet to be developed, the plan might include details on past emissions and ideas for cutting future pollution.

Mary Kate McLaughlin, a refinery spokeswoman, said there are environmental benefits and production efficiencies from producing power on site rather than buying it off the grid.

Cherry said RGGI's real value may be in proving to the federal government that carbon dioxide emissions can be addressed without disrupting the economy.

"CO2 is not a public-health threat, it's a climate-change threat and climate change, thankfully, is a decades-long problem," he said.

"We don't need to include the refinery to prove the viability of cap-and-trade or regional efforts, and that's what we're trying to do here," he added.

DNREC Deputy Secretary David Small noted that while no technology to reduce CO2 emissions currently exists, the refinery is subject to a host of regulations governing other air pollutants. It has spent tens of millions to reduce emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, he said.

"If people think we're being soft on the refinery, they need to step back and look at the bigger picture of air pollution, beyond just carbon dioxide," he said.

But environmentalists aren't convinced the refinery deserves a waiver.

"They're a huge carbon emission source; they ought to be part of the deal," said former DNREC secretary Nick DiPasquale, now conservation chair for the Delaware Audubon Society.

Michael Fiorentino, executive director of the Mid-Atlantic Environmental Law Center, noted that the refinery's six generating units have a combined capacity of about 360 megawatts, meaning it theoretically could sell about 36 megawatts to the grid annually without penalty. That could result in a windfall and competitive advantage for the refinery over utilities subject to RGGI, which applies to electricity generators with a capacity of 25 megawatts or more, he argued.

"As a policy matter, I think it's a real mistake to let the refinery off the hook," Fiorentino said.

Beside the refinery exemption, environmentalists have doubts about other proposed RGGI rules outlined in authorizing legislation that they hope will be amended. While other RGGI states plan to auction 90 percent or more of their allowances, Delaware wants to start by auctioning only 60 percent of its allowances, giving away the other 40 percent.

"That's a huge giveaway to the power generators," Tolman said.

Small argued that starting at 60 percent and increasing the auction allowance 8 percent each year will help buffer the cost impact of CO2 reductions, which likely will be passed on to rate payers in the form of higher electricity prices. He noted that some states served by the grid that includes Delaware are not participating in RGGI, meaning Delaware generators selling electricity will be competing with utilities in other states that don't have to purchase carbon credits.

"There is, I think, a fairly high level of sensitivity to electricity prices," Small said, referring to sharp rate hikes in recent years following deregulation.

The authorizing bill also directs that 65 percent of the auction revenues be given to the Sustainable Energy Utility, a program set up by lawmakers to help promote energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies. Environmentalists are concerned about a proposal to allow the SEU to be administered by a for-profit entity, and about conflicts of interest involving lawmakers who control the existing oversight board and would be instrumental in choosing their replacements.

"We think the design of the SEU does not provide proper assurance of effective, efficient and conflict free-management," Fiorentino said.

While DNREC believes the SEU is the proper vehicle for using RGGI revenue to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy efforts, Cherry said the utility's governance structure needs to be resolved "sooner rather than later."

Current plans call for Delaware to have its RGGI rules in place by the end of the year and participate in its first auction early next year.

On the Net:

Valero Energy Corp.: <http://www.valero.com>

Delaware Natural Resources and Environmental Control: <http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov>

Of greenhouse gases and greenbacks

Senate debate on a proposal to impose pollution regulations is likely to center on the financial stakes.

By Richard Simon, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Monday, June 2, 2008

WASHINGTON -- A major climate-change measure goes before the Senate this week for the first time since Democrats declared it a priority after taking control of Congress, but the long-awaited debate is ranging beyond the effects of global warming.

It also is focusing on Washington's most primal issue, money.

The bill would impose new pollution regulations on industries while significantly expanding another business, carbon "offsetting." Billions of dollars would potentially be available for farmers who offered polluters a way to make amends for excess emissions -- a provision that could attract crucial support from farm-state lawmakers.

"I definitely think this debate will be primarily about economics, because there are very few voices left who want to argue about whether or not global warming is really a problem," said Dan Lashof, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council climate center, a bill supporter.

Given the financial stakes, agricultural interests from Georgia pecan growers to Montana wheat growers are among those weighing in as lobbyists fortify their positions.

"The global warming fight is not only a battle over big pollution -- it's a battle over big bucks," said Frank O'Donnell of Clean Air Watch.

The shift in the focus of the debate reflects two changes: The sense of urgency about climate change has grown, and businesses are more open to federal rules in order to avert future uncertainties.

A longshot, but odds rise

The bill, sponsored by Sens. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) and John W. Warner (R-Va.), seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 66% below 2005 levels by midcentury. Companies that cut gases even more than that could sell pollution rights to those having difficulty meeting caps.

Although the odds of passing such legislation climbed when Democrats won control of Congress in 2006, President Bush opposes mandatory cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. The Senate measure is considered a longshot for passage this year.

Bill supporters say that even if they can't reach the 60 votes needed to break a filibuster, amassing majority support would provide momentum for next year. (In 2003, 43 senators voted in favor of an emissions cap, not enough for passage.)

All three major presidential candidates -- Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona and Democratic Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York and Barack Obama of Illinois -- support mandatory reductions, and the bill is expected to form the framework for action when a new administration takes over.

Backers and opponents have been turning up the heat.

If the U.S. imposes emissions caps when big polluters like China and India have not, critics contend, the American economy will be devastated, with more jobs heading overseas and energy prices rising further, especially in states that rely on coal power.

Lashof and other supporters counter that there is also "the cost of failing to address global warming."

Senate Environmental Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who will lead the fight for the bill, sought Saturday to rally public support.

"There are some in the Senate who insist that global warming is nothing more than science fiction," she said in the Democrats' radio address. "These are the same kind of voices who said that the world was flat, cigarettes were safe, cars didn't need air bags -- long after the rest of us knew the truth."

Cultivating farmers' help

Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) said sponsors were trying to "buy -- excuse me, win -- the support of groups all across this country."

"We should win support based on it being good policy," he said. "Instead, the authors of this bill have tried to win support by spreading money around."

For example: The auto industry would receive aid so it could build cleaner-burning engines, the coal industry to develop emissions-reducing technology.

For farmers, the bill offers a new opportunity to make money. After taking steps to keep carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere -- practicing no-till farming, for example, or planting trees on crop land -- they could sell so-called carbon offsets to polluters.

Sponsors hope those provisions will attract farm-state votes, much as an ethanol mandate generated pivotal Corn Belt support for 2005 energy legislation.

"We see the enthusiastic support of the ag community as being a critical element in piecing together the 60 votes we need," said energy lobbyist Eric Washburn, a former Senate aide.

Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) said offsets were one reason he was now supporting the legislation, which would give Montana farmers "a chance to be part of the climate-change solution." He previously opposed emissions caps.

Businesses can already buy carbon offsets, but Washburn said mandatory reductions would "immensely" expand the number of industries involved.

In a sign of farmers' interest in offsets, Sen. Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.) himself registered as an offset provider on the Chicago Climate Exchange after planting more trees on his own farm.

Farm groups are concerned that bill revisions will limit offset opportunities, and are working on proposed changes.

But environmental groups are concerned about overemphasizing offsets.

Erich Pica, domestic policy director for Friends of the Earth, said offsets give companies a "cheap out" for polluting.

Lashof agreed: "Unlimited use of offsets would delay investments that are needed to clean up the primary sources of global warming pollution."

And Daniel J. Weiss, senior fellow and director of climate strategy at the Center for American Progress, said, "We must be sure that companies that buy offsets to avoid their own emissions reductions are not paying for something that would have happened anyway."

Boxer, meanwhile, has been working to find ways to round up votes.

Among her ideas: billions of dollars for tax relief to help consumers with any increase in energy bills resulting from the regulations.

"That is what I knew I had to do to build support for the bill," she said in an interview.

"Now, we may not be there yet. But this is a landmark piece of legislation, and we need to take it as far as we can."

Senate to take up climate bill

By H. JOSEF HEBERT, Associated Press Writer
Modesto Bee, Monday, June 2, 2008

WASHINGTON — Most senators acknowledge that climate change poses a major environmental threat, but getting agreement on how to deal with it is another matter.

The Senate on Monday will take up legislation that calls for cutting carbon dioxide and other so-called greenhouse gases by about 70 percent from power plants, refineries, factories and transportation by mid-century.

But the bill's chances of passing the Senate are viewed as slim as its supporters are not expected to muster the 60 votes needed to overcome a certain filibuster threat. Prospects in the House are even less certain.

But both Democrats and Republicans appeared eager to debate global warming and both sides are preparing a string of amendments for later this week - some to make the legislation stronger, others to weaken it.

GOP senators hope to focus on the potential economic impact of the legislation, predicting the shift away from carbon-intensive fossil fuels like coal and oil will lead to higher costs for electricity, gasoline, natural gas and fuel oil for heating.

Meanwhile Democratic sponsors of the bill are trying to blunt the cost issue by proposing to funnel tens of billions of dollars a year to help people pay their energy bills, ease carbon-intensive industries' transition away from fossil fuels, and spur development of alternative energy sources.

The bill would cap the amount of carbon dioxide that affected industries would be allowed to release. Companies would be provided emission allowances - some for free and other auctioned off. The allowances could be traded in an open market among companies that either need to buy them to meet the emissions cap, or can sell them because their emissions have fallen below the cap.

Revenue from the pollution allowances - an estimated \$6.7 trillion over nearly four decades - would be used to hold down the cost of complying with the new carbon limits, and help people pay energy bills. Some of the money would be used for \$800 billion in tax break over the 40 years for people facing high energy costs, according to the bill's sponsors.

The legislation "will give us the resources to help consumers with energy costs, without increasing the (federal) deficit," said Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., a key sponsor and chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee. "This bill provides the tools we need to make America more energy independent by investing in energy efficiency and new clean energy sources."

The bill would require an 18 percent reduction of greenhouse gases below 2005 levels by 2020 and about 70 percent below that level by 2050. Some sources would not be covered, so the overall U.S. emission reductions would be by about two-thirds by 2050.

While environmentalists have preferred even stronger measures that would cut greenhouse emissions by as much as 80 percent by mid-century, most support the Senate bill as a step in

addressing climate change. The bill also has picked up support recently from a dozen unions, the nation's mayors, a number of governors and religious groups.

General Electric Co., Alcoa Inc., and Exelon Corp, the country's biggest operator of nuclear power plants, are expected Monday at a news conference with Boxer and Sen. Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., another chief sponsor, to support the legislation.

But many business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, have criticized the measure as too costly. The charge against the bill has been led by those that would be most affected including the oil and coal industries.

Such carbon reductions in the time required by the legislation threatens "the American way of life," declares an advertisement by the American Association for Clean Coal Electricity, whose members include coal companies and utilities that rely heavily on coal.

The bill's supporters counter with studies that show modest cost increases from the emission caps if there is an expansion of alternative energy sources including solar, wind and carbon-free nuclear power as well as energy efficiency and conservation.

"We want to make sure ... we don't forget that the cost of inaction on global warming would be much higher than the cost of the emission reductions called for in this bill," said Daniel Lashoff, director of the Climate Center at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Industries Allied to Cap Carbon Differ on the Details

By Jad Mouawad

N.Y. Times, Monday, June 2, 2008

Some of the most powerful corporate leaders in America have been meeting regularly with leading environmental groups in a conference room in downtown Washington for over two years to work on proposals for a national policy to limit carbon emissions.

The discussions have often been tense. Pinned on a wall, a large handmade poster with Rolling Stones lyrics reminds everyone, "You can't always get what you want."

What unites these two groups — business executives from Duke Energy, the Ford Motor Company and Conoco Phillips, as well as heads of environmental organizations like the Natural Resources Defense Council — is a desire to deal with climate change. They have broken with much of corporate America to declare that it is time for the federal government to act and set mandatory limits on emissions.

What divides them is that dealing with climate change will almost certainly hurt some industries and enrich others. Billions of dollars are at stake. Depending on how the nation decides to tackle the problem, electricity bills in some states could rise 50 percent, and gasoline prices could go up 50 cents a gallon.

"It's really now a battle over the economics," said James E. Rogers, chief executive of Duke Energy, who has long advocated curbing carbon emissions. "The debate is not about the climate problem. Everybody could agree on the principles and still get the economics wrong."

The Senate is to vote Monday to kick off a weeklong discussion on carbon limits. But the intense debates under way already illustrate just how hard it will be for Congress to satisfy conflicting business interests while coming up with a global-warming plan that works.

Opposition from corporate interests, including oil, gas and power companies, prompted the Bush administration to opt out of the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty that called on developed countries to limit their emissions.

But the political winds have shifted. All three presidential candidates have said they favor mandatory curbs on emissions, and the Democratic majority in Congress wants a strong climate

policy. The Senate debate could help set parameters of future legislation, which many experts expect to see within two years.

Congress is considering a complicated approach that would set a limit, or cap, on emissions that would be reduced each year. It would also create emissions permits that large industrial companies, like oil refineries or power plants, would be required to use.

By putting a value on carbon dioxide, this cap-and-trade system would provide incentives for companies to reduce emissions. Experts say it could turn into one of the biggest markets in the world, estimated to be worth over \$200 billion a year.

Thus far, climate policy has been slowly shaped by states like California and Massachusetts, with others following. The resulting patchwork of policies has created uncertainty for companies, some of which have recognized that federal system to limit carbon is ultimately unavoidable.

"If they are not at the table, they will not have a hand in the making of the regulation," said Robert N. Stavins, director of the environmental economics program at Harvard University.

That recognition led to the Climate Action Partnership, the Washington group, in which corporate behemoths and environmental groups have been debating climate policy for over two years, sometimes meeting every week, in order to force the issue.

In January 2007, the eclectic group endorsed a bold national policy that called for reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of 60 percent to 80 percent by 2050, an aggressive target that is in line with recommendations from an international panel of scientists. But the group, which now has 33 members, has failed to reach consensus on a variety of issues, including how to allocate carbon permits and whether to include a price cap for carbon credits.

"They helped crystallize the concerns about climate," said David G. Victor, the director of the energy and sustainable development program at Stanford University and an expert on climate policy who has been closely following the debates. "But the moment the coalition starts to focus on the details, it starts breaking apart. It's a litmus test for the debate in the country."

The sharpest battle lines have been drawn over the structure of a cap-and-trade system. This mostly centers on whether carbon allocations — or pollution permits, as some see them — should be granted to companies or auctioned off.

Under one proposal, Congress would give away about half the allowances to businesses like power plants and oil companies, but also to states and farmers, in order to give time for them to adapt to lower-carbon technologies. Over time, it would gradually sell the rest to the highest bidder, raising money for developing alternative energy sources.

The bill, sponsored by Senators Joseph L. Lieberman an independent, and John W. Warner, a Republican, passed a crucial vote in a committee last December and will be debated on the Senate floor this week.

Under a similar emissions-trading system in Europe, carbon currently trades at around 26.45 euros a ton, or about \$41. At that price, the value of the carbon credits would be about \$220 billion in the first year alone.

The debate over who gets carbon credits is particularly intense in the power sector, which creates 40 percent of the nation's carbon emissions.

Companies that rely on coal to generate power say that allowances should be free so that customers in the Midwest and the Great Plains, where coal is mostly used, are not disproportionately penalized. Coal accounts for half the nation's power generation, and executives like Mr. Rogers of Duke say these customers should not have to bear the brunt of a national climate policy.

But not everyone wants to see allowances doled out free, especially among power producers that are less dependent on coal than Duke. Lewis Hay III, chairman of FPL Group, a Florida power company, says carbon emitters should have to pay for their emissions.

"There is just going to be a giant fight over the free allowances," he said.

Oil companies are also unhappy with the Senate plan. Although the transportation sector represents around 35 percent of the nation's carbon emissions, oil companies and refiners — which fuel that sector — would be granted just 4 percent of total allowances. That would force them to buy carbon credits, which would drive up the price of gasoline and diesel fuels.

At a time of sharply rising prices, oil executives say this is not the best way to reduce carbon emissions. Better, they argue, to raise fuel efficiency requirements directly or set up a low-carbon fuel standard.

The other big fight splitting corporations and environmental groups is whether to set a maximum price on carbon credits.

Many environmental groups oppose this, fearing it might jeopardize the ultimate goal, which is to reduce emissions. They say that if the price is artificially kept too low, companies would have fewer incentives to cut emissions.

But business groups say a ceiling would keep prices from skyrocketing. Some fear that higher energy costs would reduce companies' ability to compete globally and could drive jobs to countries that do not limit carbon. John Engler, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, said the climate bill amounted to "economic disarmament."

As the fight escalates, trade groups are planning ad campaigns to make their case against a climate policy. One ad, produced by the United States Chamber of Commerce, shows a man cooking breakfast over candles in a cold, darkened house, then jogging to work on empty highways, asking: "Is it really how Americans want to live?"

Setting a price for carbon will raise energy costs throughout the economy, experts said. The Environmental Protection Agency estimated recently that a cap-and-trade bill could reduce gross domestic product by 0.9 percent to 3.8 percent by 2050.

"The reality is that cutting emissions is going to cost money," said Peter C. Fusaro, chairman of Global Change Associates, an energy and environmental consulting firm.

[L.A. Times editorial, Monday, June 2, 2008:](#)

A chilling global warming forecast

New reports about climate change should have us all sweating about the future.

There's always a new report about global warming, but the one released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with its charts on optimal temperatures for soybeans and peanuts, is downright creepy in its detail. This isn't your usual futuristic fodder, with vague but dire predictions. The USDA report is more frightening because it states matter-of-factly the practical changes in farming, forestry and water that are transforming the landscape now and will do so again over the next few decades.

The Senate is scheduled to vote this week on a sweeping bill that would require carbon emissions to be slashed 70% by mid-century. Its chances for passage are slim; President Bush opposes it, as he has opposed all meaningful attempts to curb global warming, on the grounds that it would harm the economy. He ought to read the USDA study, along with a similar but more comprehensive report released last week by his science advisors, which specifies the effects of global warming and its very real costs.

The USDA analysis points out the quandary we're already in after decades of inaction: The impacts during the next few decades are unavoidable. "Much of this change will be caused by greenhouse gas emissions that have already happened," the report says. In other words, we have to plan for adjusting to climate change, as well as preventing it from spiraling into a crisis in this century and beyond.

Though the report stops short of making recommendations, it implies the need for major shifts in agriculture. And there was some good news, though not as much as the bad. Northern latitudes

will experience milder winters -- good for cattle -- and longer growing seasons, but also longer lifetimes for harmful pests. The South might grow too hot for traditional crops such as peanuts and watermelon. The eastern United States will get more rain, but weeds, flourishing in the presence of increased carbon dioxide, will migrate north. Crops that require cold snaps are in trouble.

The prognosis for California is especially discouraging. With a smaller snowpack and less rain, the state will experience longer and more severe droughts. Some crops in the San Joaquin and Salinas valleys might find higher temperatures intolerable, threatening the state's status as a food bowl for the nation. California, though stymied by federal regulators, has led the nation in trying to combat greenhouse gases. But it has been slower to take practical steps to adapt to the warming it can't prevent. The state cannot put off water conservation measures, and with longer and more dangerous fire seasons, it cannot afford to permit increased sprawl into forests and brush areas.

At the national level, the report should awaken the agriculture sector to the disruption ahead. If the farm lobby, which is powerful enough to continually win wasteful subsidies even though they benefit only a tiny minority, were to team up with environmentalists, imagine what they could do to fight climate change.

[N.Y. Times editorial, Sat., May 31, 2008:](#)

The Worst Way of Farming

In the past month, two new reports have examined how farm animals are raised in this country. The report funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts calls the prevailing system "industrial farm animal production." The report from the Union of Concerned Scientists prefers the term "confined animal feeding operations."

No matter what you call it, it adds up to the same thing. Millions of animals are crowded together in inhumane conditions, causing significant environmental threats and unacceptable health risks for workers, their neighbors and all the rest of us.

The astonishing increase in the number and size of confined animal operations has been spawned largely by the very structure of American farm supports, which always has been skewed in a way that concentrates farming in fewer and fewer hands. As both of these reports make clear, the so-called efficiency of industrial animal production is an illusion, made possible by cheap grain, cheap water and prisonlike confinement systems.

In short, animal husbandry has been turned into animal abuse. Manure — traditionally a source of fertilizer — has been turned into toxic waste that fouls the air and adjacent water bodies. Crowding creates health problems, resulting in the chronic overuse of antibiotics.

And, because the modest profits in confinement operations require the lowest possible labor costs, including automated feeding, watering and manure-handling systems, these operations have helped empty and impoverish rural America.

The Pew report recommends new laws regulating pollution from industrial farms as rigorously as pollution from other industries, a phasing-out of confinement systems that restricts "natural movement and normal behavior," a ban on antibiotics used only to promote animal growth and the application of antitrust laws to encourage more competition and less concentration.

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, June 1, 2008:](#)

'Editorial bias'

The Bee's long-standing editorial bias against a Las Vegas-style casino along Highway 99 is ill-informed. Traffic congestion is cited as a significant negative impact. Creating traffic congestion in the foothills of the southern Sierra, where the roadway system is grossly inadequate, would be ludicrous.

Building a casino of the magnitude planned would not only negatively impact rural roadways, but would also increase air pollution in the foothill and mountain areas from the millions of auto-using visitors per year such a project would ultimately draw.

Additionally, this proposed casino would greatly impact the scarce water resources of the area. Interjecting such a large urban project into the infrastructure-starved foothills would be an unmitigated disaster.

Pressures would significantly increase for the urbanization of this sensitive source watershed area, which cannot even begin to support such intense development.

Where better to build such large urban projects than near existing freeways (and possible high-speed rail access) and where urban infrastructure is readily and easily available?

Gary L. Temple, Auberry

Reduce the emissions

During the current campaign, the politicians running for president throw terms around such as "global warming" and "cap-and-trade." To most, that sounds like an excellent policy, setting a limit for carbon-dioxide emissions and selling the rights for emission to various companies and letting them fight among themselves for them.

But as an environmentalist will tell you, or anyone who knows how the cap-and-trade policies work, this will not work unless you decrease the cap annually and reduce emissions. Have at it, guys.

Elizabeth Dayton, Fresno

[Guest Commentary in LA Daily News, Sunday, June 1, 2008:](#)

17 million at risk from our bad air

By Lauren Wood, Columnist

FLYING into Los Angeles is a joyous occasion. It means that I am home from school for a break, and I get to spend the next few days or so with friends and family enjoying all that Los Angeles has to offer - including the blanket of smog that hides buildings and streets from view as my plane descends into Burbank Airport.

For those who see what I have seen, it is not surprising that Los Angeles is rated overall the most polluted metropolitan area in the United States. The American Lung Association's "State of the Air: 2008" reported that the region including Los Angeles, Riverside and Long Beach received a grade of F for having an unacceptably high number of days with unhealthy levels of particulate matter.

Particulate matter consists of microscopic dust and output from cars that can settle in our lungs or even enter into our bloodstreams, affecting cardiovascular health. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, this is what causes haze and smog, that soupy brown color we see upon our airplane's descent.

On top of breathing in particulate matter, we also live in the nation's most ozone-polluted air. Ozone in the atmosphere is good because it protects us from harmful ultraviolet rays. Ozone in the air we breathe is not; it causes lung inflammation and affects cardiovascular health, which only gets worse with long-term exposure.

San Bernardino, Riverside and Los Angeles counties were ranked first, third, and fifth, respectively, for having the highest average of days in the country with unhealthy levels of ozone.

But it is not all bad news! Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa recently congratulated the county for being ranked second in the report for having, on average, fewer days of dangerously high levels of short-term particulate matter than Philadelphia.

"Today I'm proud," the mayor boasted "...to say for the first time, it feels good to be No. 2."

The fact is, we've still failed. For each of these cases - short-term and long-term particulate matter and ozone - the greater Los Angeles area fails to meet the standards set by the EPA called the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Villaraigosa applauds Los Angeles for dropping a rank, yet let us compare numbers to the new "worst offender" in the United States. Overall pollution levels in Philadelphia puts 2,462,571 people at risk, whereas 17,775,984 people are currently at risk in the Los Angeles area. The at-risk population includes children under 18 years of age, adults over 65 years old, and those with chronic diseases such as asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. These 17.5 million-plus people suffer from increased morbidity and mortality rates due to our current pollution levels.

Villaraigosa says he wants Los Angeles to be "completely off the list" in the future, but given the sprawling nature of our city and a growing population, dropping off the top 25 list of the worst offenders is not enough. Pollution levels would still affect millions of people. The idea of the NAAQS, or more specifically in California, the California Ambient Air Quality Standards, is to reduce pollution levels to an "adequate margin of safety" where these levels do not harm just enough people.

The greater Los Angeles area may reduce its average number of high-pollution-level days or the level of particulate matter in the air, but the number of our at-risk population will still be as large if not larger than the worst culprits.

The "State of the Air" by the American Lung Association, environmental policies and politicians should put more of an emphasis on the total number of people affected in the at-risk population and base ranks upon these numbers. Total counts or percentages of the population at risk are easier for the general public to understand how pollution harms members in our community.

Imagine hearing or reading a news report. Which would give you a better understanding of the consequences of pollution? "In Los Angeles, from 2004 to 2006, ozone levels were unhealthily high for 90.3 days" or "from 2004 to 2006, 17,775,984 people were put at risk due to unhealthily high ozone levels"?

We must emphasize the latter. We need to think about the people we are putting at risk, even as No. 2.

Born and raised in Valley Glen, Lauren Wood is a sophomore majoring in human biology at Stanford University.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Sunday, June 1, 2008:](#)

Big West refinery must prove it can be 'safe neighbor'

Kern County Supervisor Mike Maggard to Big West refinery officials: "If we don't take all the precautions, our first responders, and therefore the public, is at risk."

Maggard wasn't referring to the company's controversial plans to expand its Rosedale Highway refinery and use a potentially deadly acid to produce a cleaner-burning gasoline.

He was talking about Big West's recent failure to notify local fire and public safety agencies of a mishap at the refinery involving its existing operation.

If Big West can't do better with its present operation and emergency responses, why would company officials expect Kern's elected leaders and the public to support the refinery's expansion and the introduction of even more deadly chemicals?

Maggard's words ring true for both the present and expanded refinery. If "all the precautions" are not taken, this entire community will be at risk.

That means:

- Big West and county public safety agencies must tighten notification procedures and oversight of the refinery's present operation.
- Approval of the refinery's expansion must follow intense public scrutiny and hearings before both the county Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.
- Requirements must be imposed to assure the public and that includes those who live, work, shop and attend schools near the refinery that they will be safe.

Kern County supervisors lashed out at Big West officials last week when they appeared before the board to answer questions about a leak of anhydrous ammonia just after midnight on May 18.

A refinery alarm directed workers to evacuate. The alarm was heard by people who lived nearby. An off-duty Bakersfield police officer contacted his station.

Big West officials did not notify fire and environmental health agencies of the leak. They contend state law does not require them to report small leaks.

But supervisors weren't buying that. They expressed concern that emergency crews responding to the scene without knowing the extent of the situation could have been in danger if the leak had been bigger and a cloud of ammonia formed.

Eventually during the sometimes-heated exchange, Big West officials conceded they should have reported the incident.

County supervisors and Big West officials reached a "gentlemen's agreement" at last week's board meeting. Company officials promised to contact fire and environmental agencies regardless of the size of future leaks.

Clearly more is needed than a "gentlemen's agreement." Big West Safety and Environmental Director Bill Chadick told *The Californian* after the meeting that the company will turn down the volume on its alarm so it cannot be heard outside the refinery.

Company officials are also asking the county Environmental Health Department to clarify the refinery's reporting responsibilities.

Big West uses pure ammonia, which presents a significant risk because it can vaporize and form a toxic cloud. Environmental Health Director Matt Constantine told supervisors that Big West is placed in the highest risk category of any facility in the county because of the amount of pure ammonia stored at the refinery.

The company's expansion plans call for the introduction of modified hydrofluoric acid, which is the focus of an escalating dispute over the refinery's potential threat to residents and workers.

Decades ago, the refinery was located on the outskirts of town. It is now surrounded by homes, shopping centers, businesses and schools.

No one disputes the refinery's contribution to the local economy, job market and nation's fuel supply. But its continued operation and its expansion depend on its ability to be a safe neighbor.

[Letter to the Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, May 31, 2008:](#)

Resist Wal-Mart

Editor: I write to encourage all Mercedians to resist the building of a Wal-Mart Distribution Center in our city, as any reasonable cost-to-benefit assessment that takes into account all aspects weighs heavily against the proposed project.

One does not have to demonize Wal-Mart to realize how bad a distribution center will be. I was pleased to find Wal-Mart open after 10:30 p.m. one night when I needed snow chains to drive in the mountains after a snowstorm. The price was competitive, a few of the workers were singing along with the Ranchero hits playing overhead (I too am a fan), and most seemed pretty happy to be there. Further, a Wal-Mart Distribution Center will bring some jobs to the area and even if low

paying, when more people work that can lift the general standard of living. On the other hand, there are a lot of reasons to chastise Wal-Mart's management for unjust labor practices, as they are one of the wealthiest corporations in the world, but resists better pay, better working conditions and adequate health care for their work force.

The main reason for resisting the distribution center has nothing to do with general feelings about Wal-Mart, rather it is our climate and geology that act together with our pollution to create the worst air quality in the nation. But enough has been said about the fact that we live in a large bowl that traps pollution, and that the distribution center will dump much more pollution into that bowl that we all must then breathe. Another cost associated with the distribution center is the blight of the box-store town that Wal-Mart type stores are turning us into and the even better jobs we stand to lose due to that aesthetic blight.

We chose to build UC Merced here and with that choice we turned a corner on the direction that our city could and should take relative to future development. Rather than the box-store town that many of our neighbors have turned into, we can become a corridor for new high tech, especially "green" high tech, businesses that are better paying and better for our health.

We cannot have it both ways because in order to get the high tech businesses, UC has to attract top-notch scientists to get the prestige and grants that go along with that prestige. Since top-notch scientists and high tech business leaders are well educated, in high demand and make great salaries, they will choose to live in a place that promises a quality life for their family.

About the best thing we could do to scare these folks away is to build a Wal-Mart Distribution Center off of the new ramp that will be taking everyone to UC Merced who drives from the south on Highway 99. If you want to sell a house you have to think in terms of "curb appeal," and the same goes for selling our city. I am not sure what we should put in that area, but whatever it is let's make it something more attractive.

Keith Law, Merced

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Friday, May 30, 2008](#)

Sacramento's carbon footprint ranked 12th smallest by Brookings Institution

Something surprising to consider when you're stuck in traffic, your car belching fumes: When it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, most places are worse than Sacramento.

The Brookings Institution think tank said the Sacramento region has the 12th-smallest carbon footprint in the nation on a per-capita basis. In a study released Thursday, Brookings estimated the per-capita greenhouse gas emissions of the 100 largest U.S. metropolitan areas.

The average resident of the four-county area emitted 1.768 tons of carbon in 2005, the most recent data available, Brookings said. That was well below the U.S. average of 2.24 tons and a drop of 8.4 percent from 2000.

Honolulu had the smallest carbon footprint; Los Angeles was next. Lexington, Ky., had the largest.

Mark Muro, policy director of Brookings' metropolitan policy program, said Sacramento's comparatively good score had little to do with transportation. Motorists were only about average, a reflection of "the relative sprawl of the region," Muro said.

Translation: Longer commutes mean more greenhouse gas emissions.

On the other hand, the growth has brought about plenty of new, energy-efficient houses with energy-efficient appliances, Muro said. That's one reason why California had six of the study's top 15 cities.

The study was confined to regional highway transportation and residential energy use. It didn't cover industrial emissions or local road use.

– Dale Kasler

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the fire at Universal Studios, no victims reported. Neighboring residents are told to stay indoors and reduce outdoor activity due to poor air quality. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Incendio en los Estudios Universal

Quedan reducidos a cenizas varios sets de filmación; no se reportaron víctimas

Carlos Avilés

La Opinión, Monday June, 02, 2008

Un incendio de película en los Estudios Universal de Hollywood dejó carbonizado a King Kong y reducidos a cenizas varios escenarios de filmación como las avenidas de Nueva York y la calle donde se filmó Back to the Future. El parque de diversiones se vio obligado a cerrar sus puertas debido al siniestro.

Al menos 300 bomberos, al igual que varios helicópteros cisterna, batallaron con las llamas que se propagaron desde las 4:30 de la mañana en el set de la Calle de Nueva York, un punto de atracción del famoso "Studio Tour" del parque.

Las llamas muchas veces recreadas en las películas filmadas en este escenario y que esta vez fueron reales, fueron contenidas hasta la tarde de ayer, después de casi 12 horas de combatir las, según informó el capitán Mike Brown, del Departamento de Bomberos del Condado de Los Ángeles (LACFD).

"Fue uno de los incendios más difíciles de extinguir por su tamaño y su complejidad", dijo Brown.

Escenarios como el Reloj de la Corte, utilizado en la película Back to the Future para enviar a Michael J. Fox a través del tiempo, así como las calles donde se filmaron escenas de las películas Bruce Almighty y The Transformers quedaron seriamente dañados, señaló el inspector Darryl Jacobs, vocero del LACFD.

Estas mismas estructuras resultaron dañadas en otro incendio que ocurrió en 1990, el cual generó pérdidas de casi 25 millones de dólares de ese entonces. El incidente fue provocado por un guardia de seguridad que fue condenado a cuatro años de cárcel.

La causa del incendio de ayer está aún bajo investigación y no se ha estimado cuál será el monto total de los daños. Sin embargo, se especula que podría ascender a varios millones de dólares, según las autoridades.

Cientos de visitantes al parque de diversiones que esperaban ayer en la entrada principal fueron enviados a sus casas luego de que las autoridades del parque decidieran a las 2:30 de la tarde que éste no abriría.

El Universal City Walk y los cines adyacentes, al igual que el Anfiteatro Gibson que albergó los "Video Music Awards", sí operaron en horas de la tarde.

En un fin de semana común, se estima que cerca de 25 mil personas visitan esta atracción turística.

NBC Universal informó en un comunicado de prensa que el parque abrirá sus puertas hoy lunes a las 9:00 de la mañana.

Quince minutos después del anuncio del cierre del parque, una explosión cercana a la videoteca en llamas, dejó a un agente del Sheriff y a un bombero seriamente heridos por el impacto. Ambos fueron transportados a un centro asistencial.

Otras ocho personas que combatían las llamas también resultaron heridas.

El incendio de ayer no es el primer siniestro de este tipo en el estudio de películas más grande del mundo.

Aunado al incendio de 1990 que forzó las evacuaciones de restaurantes y cines y dejó varias estructuras dañadas también hubo percances en 1991 y 1997.

A pesar de que la videoteca que contenía cientos de copias de películas y programas de televisión, algunas desde 1920, fueron consumidas por el fuego, las autoridades del centro de diversiones indicaron que "no se perdió nada irreemplazable" porque tienen otras copias.

La poca presión del agua a la hora de combatir las llamas produjo preocupación y dificultó el poder contener el fuego, según dijeron varias autoridades como el supervisor del condado Zev Yaroslavsky y el concejal de la ciudad Tom LaBonge.

Asimismo el inspector Jacobs, indicó que la calidad del aire cercano al parque de diversiones podía causar que personas tuvieran problemas de respiración por lo que se pidió que evitaran tener sus ventanas abiertas y mantenerse en sus casas.

Los Estudios Universal están ubicados nueve millas al norte de la ciudad de Los Ángeles, y son uno de los centros de atracción turística más grandes de California.

Para la elaboración de esta nota se utilizó información de agencias.