

Court rules developer fees should stay

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, October 9, 2009

FRESNO -- A state appeals court this week upheld a controversial and unusual fee that makes developers pay for pollution caused by traffic coming from new homes and businesses on the edges of cities.

The California Building Industry Association and others sued the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in June 2006, shortly after the fee began. The association and its allies called the fees illegal taxes that had no direct relation to air pollution emissions.

Last year, however, Fresno County Superior Court Judge Donald Black sided with the air pollution control district when he upheld the fees.

The building industry in turn appealed, resulting in Tuesday's 19-page ruling.

Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director, said in a statement that he hoped the Building Industry Association would now "join the many Valley developers who have taken this rule to heart and designed their projects to reduce air-quality impacts." Whether that will happen, however, is unclear.

State building industry officials -- including CEO and President Elizabeth Snow -- did not return phone calls or e-mails asking if there would be an appeal to the state Supreme Court.

But Mike Prandini, president and chief executive officer for the Building Industry Association of Fresno/Madera Counties, said Thursday that he would support an appeal.

The local building association was not a party to the lawsuit, but supported it and pays dues to the state building association, which filed the suit.

Air pollution development fees legal, says court

By Alex Cantatore, Civic Desk

Turlock Journal, Friday, October 9, 2009

A Fresno appeals court has sided with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, upholding a rule allowing development fees for air-pollution mitigation.

"We were confident from the start that we would prevail in the case and are very pleased with the decision," said Philip Jay, District legal counsel. "It's extremely satisfying for the court to uphold the District's innovative rule."

The District initially adopted Rule 9510, also known as Indirect Source Review, on Dec. 15, 2005. The rule requires developers to pay fees to the District based upon air-quality impacts from building activity and from use of completed developments. The District uses these fees to fund offsite emission reductions efforts, on behalf of the developer, such as retiring polluting vehicles or paving unpaved roads.

Developers also have the option of incorporating emissions mitigation measures — such as bike paths, energy efficiency initiatives, or building near transit stops — to offset development fees.

The California Building Industry Association challenged the rule in June 2006, claiming that the District had no authority to regulate development and impose fees. Their lawsuit also argued that development fees amounted to a tax, in violation of Proposition 13.

The Fresno County Superior Court disagreed with the BIA's claims and sided with the Air District in 2008. The BIA appealed that decision, but the Fresno Fifth District Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's ruling on Monday.

The Valley Air District, which includes all eight Valley counties from San Joaquin County in the north to Kern County in the south, was the first air district in the nation to adopt such regulation. According to Air District representatives, other areas are now looking to Rule 9510 as a model for their own potential regulation.

"We hope the state Building Industry Association will now join the many Valley developers who have taken this rule to heart and designed their projects to reduce air-quality impacts," said District Executive

Director and Air Pollution Control Officer Seyed Sadredin. "We are asking all businesses to do their part to help clean up the air and hope the association will get on board as well."

Court upholds air pollution rule

In the Stockton Record, Friday, October 9, 2009

FRESNO - An appeals court has upheld a rule holding developers accountable for air pollution resulting from their projects, officials said Thursday.

Under the rule, builders must reduce pollution that is indirectly caused by their projects, such as smog from traffic jams around new neighborhoods or shopping centers. They could do this by building more sidewalks or green spaces, for example.

The rule was adopted by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in December 2005 but was challenged by builders in court.

A Fresno County Superior Court judge ruled in 2008 that the district had authority to implement the rule. An appeals court has upheld that decision, the air district said Thursday.

State court OKs pollution fee on developers

Disputed levy targets pollution caused by new homes, businesses.

By John Ellis / The Fresno Bee

Thursday, Oct. 8, 2009

A state appellate court this week upheld a controversial and unusual fee that makes developers pay for pollution caused by traffic coming from new homes and businesses on the edges of cities.

The California Building Industry Association and others sued the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in June 2006, shortly after the fee began. The association and its allies called the fees illegal taxes that had no direct relation to air pollution emissions.

Last year, however, Fresno County Superior Court Judge Donald Black sided with the air pollution control district when he upheld the fees. The building industry in turn appealed, resulting in Tuesday's 19-page ruling.

Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director, said in a statement that he hoped the Building Industry Association would now "join the many Valley developers who have taken this rule to heart and designed their projects to reduce air-quality impacts."

Whether that will happen, however, is unclear.

State building industry officials -- including CEO and president Elizabeth Snow -- did not return phone calls or e-mails asking whether an appeal to the state Supreme Court would be made.

But Mike Prandini, president and chief executive officer for the Building Industry Association of Fresno/Madera Counties, said Thursday that he would support an appeal.

The local building association was not a party to the lawsuit, but supported it and pays dues to the state building association, which filed the suit. "We support a continued appeal, but that's their decision," Prandini said of the state association.

Prandini said appealing Black's ruling "was not a knee-jerk" decision, and he thinks there will be "due diligence to determine what the issues" are before deciding on whether to appeal to the state Supreme Court.

When the fee was approved, air district officials said it was structured in accordance with a 2003 state law that required the Valley district to levy the fees. Several state laws that year targeted the Valley because the region has some of the nation's worst air quality.

But officials also included provisions to reduce fees for builders who installed clean-air features, such as outdoor outlets for electric lawn mowers, bike lanes and energy-efficient water heaters.

A federal judge in Fresno last year also threw out a lawsuit that challenged the fees, but based on a different legal issue. That lawsuit was filed by the National Association of Home Builders.

Candidate questionnaire: Jesus Gamboa

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, Oct. 9, 2009

JESUS GAMBOA

AGE: 56

YEARS RESIDING IN VISALIA: 31

OCCUPATION: Chief Operations Officer — Proteus, Inc.

EDUCATION: Masters in Public Administration — Fresno State University

EXPERIENCE: 2 terms as Vice-Mayor; 3 terms as Mayor; 31 years in management

OTHER AFFILIATIONS: [San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District](#), American GI Forum, Northside Boxing Club, Tulare/Kings Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Council of Cities, Tulare County Association of Governments, Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs.

What are you emphasizing in your campaign?

Leadership, Experience, Commitment, Economic Development, Circulation, Public Safety.

What are your strategies for maintaining city services in a time of declining revenues?

Seek grants for special services, hold the line on back filling vacant positions, implement budget strategy to balance budget, continue to look for efficiencies in various departments, promote economic development to increase revenue base, monitor budget periodically.

Describe your philosophy on growth.

Concentric growth focusing investment in all quadrant of community, infill, incorporate smart growth principles, go slowly toward Highway 99, plan carefully along the scenic corridor/Highway 198, build community, connect neighborhoods.

The city is in the process of three major renovations to improve north-south circulation (McAuliff, Mooney, Santa Fe). What other ideas do you have for improving circulation?

Have just started widening Houston Avenue from Santa Fe to Ben Maddox, this will include the Roundabout project, currently working on Plaza Drive from Highway 198 to Goshen Avenue, widening shirk from Tulare to Goshen will improve circulation, a 3 way stop sign and/or signal at Chenoweth and Goshen Avenue is much needed, widening of intersection at Highway 198 and Plaza drive exit will facilitate traffic to the industrial Park, continue work on Lovers Lane Interchange project to include the feasibility of an interchange at Road 148 and State Route 198, just completed the Ferguson to Shirk Extension and the Riggins to St. Johns extension, opening up Hurley to Plaza Drive will open up circulation in the West and improving Highway 198 access to Noble Avenue off the Court/Highway 63 ramp access will be helpful.

What are your views about the renovations at the Oaks ballpark at Recreation Park?

I think it was a great project done at the right time during better economic conditions. The near \$14 million project (cost of both phases) helped restore an aging City asset. This was a good economic and revitalization project in the downtown area.

The city is embarking on a general plan update. What kinds of things will you want to see incorporated in that?

Incorporation of smart growth principles to include infill, pocket parks, neighborhood parks, better connectivity between neighborhoods, a regional sports park on the eastside of Visalia, land use policy along Highway 198/scenic corridor, higher densities to protect Ag land, some land designation for a Business Research Park, some clarity on the one-mile policy for supermarkets in the

Neighborhood/Community land use designation, potential sites for future fire and police sub-stations, land use designation for retail development along Dinuba Highway to the St. Johns River.

If you could wave a magic wand and have one thing built or brought into Visalia, what would it be?

Top on the list would be a four-Year University and Trader Joe's.

Availability and quality of water are becoming pressing issues, and the city has specific programs for sustaining our water supply. What else should it be doing?

We process approximately 12 million gallons per day of water at the Waste Water Treatment Plant. We are currently developing a "Reuse Plan" on how water may be used by Ag, the golf course, Cal Trans and other city uses. Any water strategy should include water conservation, use of water resistant plant species, above ground storage, ground water recharge and water stock purchases during good wet years.

What are your views on the city's so-called "green" program for energy and resource conservation? What more does the city need to do?

Visalia is very active in this arena. Visalia is a partner in the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District "Healthy Air Living Program". This program promotes employees to reduce their driving, adopts alternatives to pollution creating practices and devises energy efficiency strategies to reduce Visalia's operational emissions.

The City is moving in the right direction in regards to the "Green Movement." The City uses Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) in its bus and solid waste fleet, uses hybrid vehicles for management staff, has split containers for separation of trash, supports recycling, has a clean fleet conversion plan, provides bicycles to staff through the Vi-Cycle program, investing in solar power technology, performs energy audits, and encourages car pooling.

The City encourages the development community to incorporate energy efficient standards (aka LEED standards) into development projects and used energy efficient standards in the constructions of Fire Station 55 and the South and North side Police precincts.

The City will continue to educate staff and community on energy and resource conservation strategies.

Rideshare Week comes to CSUB

By Melissa Villagomez, Assistant Features Editor

California State University, Bakersfield, The Runner, Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2009

Want to help save the environment and save on gas money? Consider alternate transportation.

October 5-9 will be Rideshare Week, a statewide campaign that promotes carpooling, busing and other alternate means of transportation to improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion in California. Kern residents who decide to participate can fill out a pledge form that will not only show their commitment to improving Kern County, but will also make them eligible to win prizes and get free coffee during Rideshare Week.

"Rideshare week is a state--wide event to promote not just carpooling, but also any alternative transport," said Spencer Schluter, a planning intern at the Kern Council of Governments. He has been working for months to gather sponsors and spread awareness about the event.

Currently, Kern County is the second in the nation for air pollution. Traffic congestion is expected to grow at least 3 percent annually and it is estimated that four out of five commuters are driving alone.

As CSUB is predominately a commuter campus, it is important that we do our part in improving Kern County's air quality

"Studies show that of those who participate in Rideshare Week, about 60 percent will at least occasionally carpool afterwards," said Schluter.

For those whose jobs make it impractical to rideshare, there is still a chance to participate.

"Not everyone's job allows them to participate in rideshare, so what we've done is offer Lunchtime Express," said Schluter. "Instead of everyone getting in their own cars and going out to lunch, one person will go out and get lunch for everyone so everyone stays in. Right now Cataldo's, Pizza Hut and Togo's have partnered with us and will offer special deals to companies who decide to participate."

Pledge forms are available online and at the Student Union. Those who pledge to commit to rideshare at least once throughout Rideshare Week and will be entered in a drawing to win various prizes. The deadline for submitting a pledge form is Oct. 16.

If you are not sure where to find someone to share a ride with, try Kern Commuter Connection at <http://commutekern.org>. There you can be matched with others with similar driving destinations.

If you are interested in getting your workplace or club involved, Rideshare Week Tool Kits are available with posters, pledge cards, stickers and more. To request a tool kit call (661) 861-2191 or e-mail commuter@kerncog.org.

Rideshare Week will take place Oct. 5-9. For more information or to fill out a pledge form, visit www.kerncog.org/rideshare or check out Kern Commuter Connection's Facebook page.

More than 80 percent of L.A. traffic lights synchronized

Daily News Wire Services, Friday, October 9, 2009

More than 80 percent of all the traffic lights in Los Angeles are now synchronized, reducing travel times and pollution from vehicles idling at intersections, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said Thursday.

The completion of the Automatic Traffic Surveillance and Control project in the Hyde Park West area has brought the total number of synchronized traffic lights to 3,597 out of 4,400.

The system turns lights from red to green based on real-time traffic conditions. It is expected to improve the north-south traffic flow on Crenshaw Boulevard and Western Avenue, as well as on east-west arteries.

Travel speeds on those roads could improve by as much as 13 percent, while delays at intersections may be reduced up to 24 percent.

"In addition to reducing travel times and delays at intersections, signal synchronization reduces fuel use and emissions, helping to make Los Angeles the greenest big city in the nation," Villaraigosa said.

Funding for traffic light synchronization came from a statewide ballot measure approved by voters in 2006, called the Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality and Port Security Bond Act or Prop 1B.

Officials hope to have all of Los Angeles' traffic lights synchronized by 2012.

Cool air reduces Bay Area smog this year

By Denis Cuff

In the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, October 9, 2009

Bay Area residents breathed cleaner air this year as cooler summer temperatures produced fewer smoggy days.

Ozone, the irritant in smog that stings eyes and lungs, violated the federal public health standard in the nine-county region on eight days this year, compared with 12 days in 2008, the region's air pollution agency reported Thursday. The smog season ended Oct. 2

Pollution regulators said the air was better because there were fewer days of hot stagnant air — the ideal conditions for converting car and factory emissions into smog.

But regulators cautioned that more measures to curb pollution are needed if the region is to comply with the public health standard aimed at protecting the public — especially children, the elderly and the sick — from coughing, lung irritation and asthma attacks.

"We continue to make progress in the Bay Area in cleaning the air, but we have more things to do before we reach the point where we're comfortable we can attain the standard," said Jack Broadbent, chief executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Weather can cause day-to-day and year-to-year differences in ozone concentrations, especially in the Bay Area, where afternoon ocean breezes act like an air conditioner, giving the region relatively clean air compared to other urban areas.

When those breezes cease, temperatures soar and smog forms more readily.

"It's been a relatively cool year," said Gary Kendall, the air district's director of technical services.

A region gets a failing mark if smog at any single measuring station fails to meet a complicated formula based on a three-year average of its highest pollution readings. Because pollution travels, fumes from cars in San Francisco can form smog in Livermore.

Livermore had six days over the limit, the most of any measuring stations. It was followed by San Martin in Santa Clara County with five days, Los Gatos with four days and Bethel Island with three days.

Air basins that fail to meet the air quality standard can be penalized with loss of federal highway funds, and ordered to pass additional clean-air rules.

The Bay Area has much cleaner air than in Southern California's four-county South Coast air basin, which had 111 days this year in violation of the federal health standard.

One clean air advocate said the Bay Area air is too dirty.

"It's not good news that we have that many days of unhealthy air when ozone is affecting public health and the health of children," said Jenny Bard, regional air quality director for the American Lung Association of California.

Base halts compost project to get rid of foul odor Effort is suspended until officials can address neighbors' complaints.

By Deepa Bharath

The Orange County Register, Friday, October 9, 2009

GARDEN GROVE – The Los Alamitos Joint Force Training Base is temporarily suspending its 11-acre composting project to help identify and eliminate the source of a foul odor that has had neighbors riled up over the past month.

Residents from west Garden Grove, Los Alamitos, Seal Beach and Cypress came to the Los Alamitos City Council meeting this week to oppose the composting. Residents even formed a coalition called Dump the Dump to express their opposition for the five-year pilot project.

Base spokeswoman Laura Herzog said this morning that the base has by no means canceled the project or changed its agreement with the contractor, Oxnard-based Agromin.

"All we're doing is attempting to find out what's causing the odor and eliminate the source of the odor," she said.

Once that is accomplished the project will resume, but Herzog said she does not know when that will happen.

West Garden Grove neighbors say the odor has been present for several months, but became unbearable in late August.

Sarah Van Dam says she has not used her backyard – which directly faces the base – for a good part of this summer.

Her family bought the home because of breathtaking views of the public golf course and the base. But she found herself covering her nose and staring into piles of compost towering over a 6-foot green fence on the outer edge of the golf course.

They have a picnic table in their backyard. But, she asks: "Who would want to eat dinner out here with that horrible smell?"

Complaints about the smell have been pouring into the South Coast Air Quality Management District's office, said spokesman Sam Atwood. AQMD has received more than 80 complaints since late August, which is a significant number, he said. AQMD sent an inspector to investigate the odor in early September, Atwood said.

AQMD does not have any control over green waste facilities, so Atwood has been redirecting all complaints and concerns to the Orange County Health Care Agency.

Richard Sanchez, the county health agency's Director of Environmental Health, said his agency has been monitoring the composting operations. The base did not need a permit for the operation because it was less than 12,500 cubic yards, Sanchez said.

An agency investigator went to the site Sept. 29 to check the odor complaints. Beginning Sept. 30, the base stopped accepting new material and began to look for ways to deodorize the material already on the site, Sanchez said.

"They were putting tarps over the piles when they were turning the compost and also using a neutralizer and deodorizer spray to control the smell," he said.

Bill Camarillo, CEO for Agromin, said the odors occurred because his workers over-watered the piles. The moisture caused the odor, which worsened when they tried to correct it by turning the piles and airing them out.

"This has been a learning process for us," said Camarillo, whose company does green waste processing in nearly 90 communities locally.

Tony Flores, president of the Garden Grove Residents Association, said he is happy that the source of the odor is eliminated, but still concerned about what will happen in the future.

"I'd really hope that our elected officials will keep an eye on this issue," he said.

Los Alamitos Mayor Troy Edgar said the mayors of the cities concerned with the issue met with the general at the base Wednesday night. He said the general is stopping the process to review the contract and see if composting is something that the base can continue.

"I'm very excited about this and very appreciative to the general," he said.

Garden Grove neighbors say the odor has been the main problem, but there have been other issues. Several residents said they've been dealing with scores of termites and flies in their backyards.

Ross Ginn said his family hasn't been able to have friends and family over for backyard barbecues.

"The flies are just swarming and we've never had these problems before," he said.

Herzog said the base is working diligently to make sure the compost piles are reduced and won't be visible from the homes.

"We've removed three rows of compost today that have been isolated as a source of odor," she said.

As for the health issues, Herzog said the waste material they are dealing with is "pure green waste."

"There is no fecal matter or other contents in the waste and it is simply green waste like you or I have in our yards," she said.

The base has taken every effort to keep the public informed about the project including organizing a public forum May 26, she said.

Camarillo said his company will look into a variety of technologies including containing the material in vessels so the compost won't smell.

"We're reassessing it, but I'm optimistic that the project will continue the way it should," he said. "It was just a really bad start to a great project."

Obama Urged to Intensify Push for Climate Measure Backers Fear Administration Is Giving Issue Short Shift

By Juliet Eilperin and Michael D. Shear, Staff Writers
Washington Post, Monday, October 12, 2009

President Obama is coming under renewed pressure internationally and in the United States to throw his weight behind climate-change legislation, which advocates fear has suffered in light of the president's sweeping domestic agenda.

The Nobel committee's announcement Friday that Obama won the Peace Prize was a fresh reminder that much of the world expects him to lead the way toward a global climate pact. The committee cited his "more constructive role in meeting the great climatic challenges."

And in Washington, advocates are clamoring for more evidence that Obama will make good on his campaign promise to impose the first-ever national cap on greenhouse gases. Last week, the leading author of Senate climate legislation sought personal assurances from Obama during an Oval Office meeting, saying he wanted to "hear it from him directly" as he pushed ahead.

Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) told Obama he needs to direct his administration to be more aggressive in order to get Congress to take steps to limit pollution that contributes to global warming. But Kerry emerged from the meeting saying Obama had pledged closer coordination between the White House and its congressional allies on the issue.

"The bottom line is there's no way to negotiate a bill like this without the involvement of the administration that they've promised -- and they've been producing," Kerry said in an interview. "If we're going to talk about oil and gas, we need to know what the administration will sign off on."

Obama aides say the fears are unfounded, part of what senior adviser David Axelrod called "tempests and . . . kerfuffles" about the process of lawmaking that bear little relation to the actual progress they are making toward historic new laws aimed at preventing environmental degradation.

Asked to respond to concerns about the level of engagement by the White House, aides compiled the following statistics: Administration officials have met on the topic with more than half of the senators, they said. There have been calls with 100 mayors in 17 states and more than 50 energy-related events in 24 states. Officials have reached out to "hundreds" of energy stakeholders and local lawmakers, aides said.

"Our energy team is deeply, deeply involved in working with the appropriate members of Congress and their staffs. They've done a lot of work up there," Axelrod said. "This is an issue of extraordinary importance. I understand the advocates on the issue would like us to have acted by now. The president and others feel this should have been dealt with years ago."

White House officials, including energy and climate czar Carol M. Browner, Axelrod and National Economic Council Director Lawrence H. Summers, have made presentations to a group of Democrats who meet regularly each week in the Capitol to discuss climate-change legislation. And last week, Todd Stern, U.S. special envoy for climate change, met with several key senators to discuss the bill, identifying how specific provisions would affect the prospects for a global pact.

A group of centrist Democrats from manufacturing states met Thursday with Browner. One of them, Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), said the administration had "been helpful" but was still working on how to protect energy-intensive and trade-exposed industries. "The bill's not there yet," he said.

But while the White House has touted the need for energy and climate legislation in several events -- including one on Wednesday with business leaders and another with veterans last month -- it has not delved deeply into the detailed work of fashioning legislation.

Several veteran energy and environmental experts said the approach differs sharply from how Senate Democrats and a Republican White House handled the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990, a major legislative overhaul in which the White House and Environmental Protection Agency officials provided their own legislative blueprint and negotiated for weeks with a bipartisan group of senators in then-Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell's office.

"I don't see how this legislation moves forward without that kind of engagement from the president," said Jonathan Lash, president of the World Resources Institute. "As of now, we don't see personal leadership from the president in helping the Senate find a bill that can get 60 votes. I hope we will."

Kerry and Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) have been negotiating for months with colleagues on what it would take for them to support climate legislation, but it remains far shy of the 60 votes it needs for passage.

Their efforts to expand the base of support for climate legislation showed some progress Sunday, when Kerry and Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) authored a New York Times op-ed outlining possible grounds for a bipartisan deal on the issue. Graham has yet to co-sponsor the Senate bill, however.

The timeline for its consideration has slipped as well. Kerry and Boxer hoped to introduce it in late July, but the bill just came out last week and will have its first hearing late this month. Boxer's panel has suffered staff departures in recent months, including that of Joseph Goffman, a senior aide who worked on the climate bill but quit this month and will start next week as one of the EPA's senior counsels.

In an interview, Kerry said that during their meeting, Obama "reiterated how committed he is to moving forward, and to moving forward as soon as possible . . . I feel very confident there's going to be a full-court press from him to get as far as we can over the next few weeks," Kerry said.

Meaningful cuts in greenhouse gas emissions worldwide are closely tied to whether Congress adopts a binding carbon cap, which has received far less public attention than the health-care bill now dominating the Senate.

In the meantime, the EPA has been marching steadily toward greater regulation of greenhouse gasses, and the administration has promoted policies aimed at curbing the nation's carbon footprint, including new fuel economy standards for cars and light trucks. Critics favor congressional action over EPA regulations, which they call a blunt tool that could hurt the economy.

"It seems what we're observing is pressure from the White House on EPA to do things, rather than pressure from the White House on Congress to do things," said American Electric Power chief executive Michael G. Morris, whose company, one of the nation's biggest electricity providers, has endorsed the House climate bill. "That doesn't seem the best approach."

On Friday, Denmark's climate and energy minister, Connie Hedegaard, who will be chairing U.N.-sponsored climate talks in December in Copenhagen, said Obama needs to do more on climate. "It is hard to imagine that he will be receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on Dec. 10 and then come empty-handed to Copenhagen a week later," she said.

Alden Meyer, the director of strategy and policy for the Union of Concerned Scientists, said the administration needs to identify specific emissions reductions and the size of a financial aid package to developing nations to secure a climate deal.

"Without those, the best speech in the world won't suffice to shield the U.S. from blame for bringing the negotiations to a standstill, which is the likely outcome of a scenario where we can't commit to anything," Meyer wrote in an e-mail.

Green walls taking root in green building design

By Dan Nephin - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee, Sunday, October 11, 2009

PITTSBURGH -- The next big thing in green building design might be to turn an existing idea on its side.

PNC Financial Services Group Inc. recently installed a green wall the size of two tennis courts on one side of its headquarters.

Like green roofs - their perpendicular counterparts - green walls are covered in vegetation and provide the benefits of natural insulation and removal of air pollutants. PNC, which provides banking and wealth management services, estimates it will be 25 percent cooler behind the wall than the ambient summer temperatures.

The PNC wall features more than 15,000 ferns, sedums, brass buttons and other plants that create a swirling pattern of varying hues of green above the company's logo. They are divided among hundreds of 2-by-2-foot aluminum panels that were anchored onto the building's frame after part of the granite facade was removed.

"We think it's the right thing to do for our community, for our customers and our shareholders," said Gary Saulson, head of corporate real estate for PNC. "We wanted to add greenery to an area that didn't have any. ... We really view the green wall as public art."

Steven Peck, president of Green Roofs for Healthy Cities, a Toronto industry association, said interest in green walls is growing, though the group does not keep statistics. He estimates green roof installations have increased at about 30 percent a year over five years.

Green Living Technologies LLC, of Rochester, N.Y., designed the wall at PNC. Chief Executive George Irwin said the company also has installed walls in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago and Seattle.

PNC bills its green wall as the largest in North America. The wall covers nearly 2,400 square feet. PNC officials declined to give a precise estimate of its cost. Irwin said that on average green walls cost about \$100 to \$125 a square foot.

The structure at PNC requires only 15 minutes a week of watering during peak growing season - less in winter - provided through the building's plumbing system. PNC has a contract with the installer to prune the plants and replace dead ones if necessary.

Joanne Westphal, a landscape architecture professor at Michigan State University and part of the school's Green Roof Research Program, said the biggest benefit to green walls is their ability to help cool buildings through shading. They also help capture rainwater and release it more slowly into the atmosphere and stormwater systems.

Green Living says also that each of the roughly 600 panels at the PNC headquarters can offset the carbon output of one person a day.

Green Living got into the market several years ago after trying to devise a solution for a customer who wanted a green roof on a steeply pitched building. The walls can also be installed inside buildings.

Irwin said green walls aren't exactly a new idea: The Romans planted grape vines along building walls, resulting, he said, in faster growing and sweeter grapes for wine. The structures are also prevalent in Europe, where modern-day green roofs first took off.

Near ground level of the building where PNC's wall is located, at 1 PNC Plaza in downtown Pittsburgh, a small panel holds some of the plants and a plaque tells passers-by about the wall.

"I think they want to believe it's real," PNC's Saulson said, "and it is."

Climate plan sends air of unease across Rust Belt

By H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Monday, October 12, 2009

SUGARCREEK, Ohio—Nestled in Ohio's Amish country, Bill Belden's 124-year-old family owned brick company has thrived on the region's rich red clay and shale, and cheap energy from abundant coal.

Which he's convinced that a climate bill being considered in Congress will end.

A cap-and-trade system forcing businesses away from fossil fuels, especially coal, will mean higher electricity and natural gas costs, he says. And layoffs at the Belden Brick Co.

"We're already under severe economic strain," said Belden, standing beside towering stacks of fresh bricks outside one of the six plants that ring Sugarcreek.

The town, about 80 miles south of Cleveland, calls itself "the Little Switzerland of Ohio." Signs dot the highway hailing the annual Swiss Festival, quaint bed and breakfasts, and restaurants that feature traditional Dutch Amish cooking.

It's brick, however, that's Sugarcreek's economic foundation.

A lifelong Republican, Belden said his criticism of the Democratic-run Congress over global warming isn't about politics, but economics. "We've got to compete in the world and to do so we need low cost energy," he argues.

Bills before the House and Senate would cut greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent to 20 percent over the next decade and by more than 80 percent by midcentury. The government would cap emissions from power plants and industrial plants, forcing polluters to shift from fossil fuels or buy emission credits.

Either way, energy prices will jump, though by how much is the subject of much dispute.

In Ohio, and across much of the heartland from Michigan and Indiana to the Dakotas, and in Missouri and Arkansas, where agriculture and manufacturing are the business engines, the government's effort to curb climate-changing pollution is viewed widely through an economic prism: Will it increase energy costs and drive businesses and jobs overseas to countries such as China that may not commit to similar controls on fossil energy?

President Barack Obama and congressional leaders need centrist Democrats from those states to overcome solid Republican opposition to climate legislation passed by the House and awaiting Senate action.

Nowhere is the predicament more apparent than in Ohio. Here, 80 percent of the electricity comes from coal, unemployment tops 11 percent and more than one-quarter of million manufacturing jobs have vanished over the past decade.

"The climate change bill is all about jobs," said Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio.

With strong support from both environmentalists and labor unions, he's in the precarious position of trying to reconcile the urgent need to address climate change while assuring people in Ohio their jobs can be protected.

Brown's answers: push for more clean energy jobs—think wind turbines and solar panels—and make sure any bill helps offset energy price spikes and doesn't cause a plant to shut down, open shop in China and release even more carbon dioxide.

"I see it as an opportunity to make this bill work for manufacturing," he said in an interview.

It's a 30-minute drive up Interstate 77 from Belden's plants to the United Steelworkers Union office just outside Canton. Former steelworker Joe Holcomb, now a district representative for the union, says that a dozen years ago the union had 65,000 members in the state. It's now about 50,000.

Like Brown, Holcomb and union members see the climate bill debate in Washington as a path to new manufacturing jobs and way to push those numbers up again—or at least stem the slide. That's why the national union strongly backs the cap-and-trade legislation.

If energy prices jump, Holcomb says he'll put up a windmill and generate his own power.

But he's not exactly a tree-hugging environmentalist. He recalls the push decades ago to clean up Ohio's rivers and sooty air from factory smokestacks. The water became cleaner, the air healthier, but factories closed, production became more expensive, jobs were lost, he said.

His warning to those in Washington: Don't make the same mistake.

"If we're just going to put a bill in and say we're going to clean the air ... but not create jobs, we've already seen that happen. We've got to do it in a way that's going to bring jobs into this country and not let them go out of here."

Many of the union's members work across town, producing specialty steel at a mill owned by the Timken Co., a \$5.6 billion global manufacturer of high-grade precision bearings for everything from cars and locomotives to jetliners and giant wind turbines. Of its 25,000 employees worldwide, about 5,000 are in Ohio.

Its electricity bill for the steel mill and five other Ohio facilities runs as much as \$50 million a year.

Ward "Tim" Timken Jr., company's chairman, said the United States has no business capping carbon pollution and fossil fuel use unless other countries act as well.

"This whole notion that the U.S. is going to lead and set the example because it's the moral thing to do is foolish," he said in an interview at the company's technology center adjacent to the Akron-Canton airport.

Timken, a member of one of Ohio's most influential Republican families, said he doesn't understand why the steelworkers would support the climate bill.

"These guys have to wake up and realize that their jobs are stake," he said.

If the bill became law, "there would be some very difficult decisions to be made, quite frankly. I've got a global footprint. A quarter of my work force is in Asia. I've got manufacturing in Eastern Europe," he said. "These are very real threats that we're talking about."

Across the Rust Belt, people on both sides of the climate issue couch their messages in terms of jobs.

A rally in downtown Cleveland in support the bill was promoted as part of a "Made in American Jobs Tour." There barely was a mention of the cap and trade idea—and barely a crowd, maybe 50 people.

Speakers—a mix of environmentalists and labor leaders—talked of the "transition to a cleaner energy" and "retooling the manufacturing economy" and reducing America's dependence on foreign oil. The event was planned for the lakefront near the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It ended up staged in a nearby parking garage because of a sudden rainstorm.

Donald Opatka, a regional director of the Utility Workers of America, speak of the need to "transition to a cleaner energy transmission system" that will produce new jobs and save old ones.

Later, in an interview, Opatka noted the irony of his participation. Many of his union's members work at coal-burning power plants that are the climate bill's target.

"It's a real conflict for us," he said. But in the long run, climate legislation "is going to happen and we can either put our heads in the sand ... or get our oars in the water" and position workers for clean energy jobs.

At a far different rally the next day in Lima, 300 miles southwest of Cleveland, the fear is about losing jobs because of the legislation.

Lima, conservative and heavily Republican, once was a rail center and the heart of one of the nation's first oil booms more than a century ago. It's seen its share of factories close and jobs disappear. A refinery, several chemical plants, a factory making Army tanks and a Proctor and Gamble plant that makes detergent now account for much of the work.

On a Friday morning, more than 700 people have streamed into a conference room at the civic center. One-third were bused in from a Marathon Oil Co. facility in nearby Findlay. The rally is one of several dozen held around the country in recent months by the oil industry in opposition to the bill.

The crowd is a mix of oil workers, anti-government "tea party" protesters, global warming skeptics, and people just worried the legislation will send energy bills up, more jobs overseas and factories to their end. Few believe a green jobs revolution will make up for jobs that could be lost.

"It forces too many things on people," said grocery store worker Francis German, who acknowledges not knowing its details.

One of the speakers, Andy Johnson, brought a copy of the morning paper that has a picture of people lining up at a food bank the day before at one of the two Lima bowling alleys that he owns. "We were expecting a few hundred people and over a thousand showed up," he said. "This is the wrong time to be talking about" climate legislation.

Larry Ward Jr., a chef at the Holiday Inn, had no interest in the rally. He says what people in Lima, where he grew up, are really talking about is the "same as everywhere—health care."

But asked about what he thinks about Congress dealing with climate change, Ward calls it "a crock" and is skeptical about wind and solar energy replacing fossil fuels. But Robin Martin, a hotel cashier, sees climate change as worrisome and alternative energy as the future.

Mike Knisley, business manager for Local 776 of the United Association of Plumbers, Pipefitters and Service Technicians, describes the area as a blue-collar and farm community with a mix of industrial plants.

"For the most part people are looking for a commonsense approach, a balance" on climate change.

About eight in 10 of Knisley's union members work in heavy industries, including those at the Husky Oil refinery just outside of town. "If the refinery out there closes due to cap and trade we're out of business," he said.

About the climate change legislation, he said: "If we were in better economic times it would be a little bit easier pill to swallow. The timing is just bad."

As Economy Grows, So Do China's Garbage Woes

By The Associated Press

In the N.Y. Times and other papers, Oct. 12, 2009

ZHANGLIDONG, China (AP) -- Visitors can smell this village long before they see it.

More than 100 dump trucks piled high with garbage line the narrow road leading to Zhanglidong, waiting to empty their loads in a landfill as big as 20 football fields.

In less than five years, the Zhengzhou Comprehensive Waste Treatment Landfill has overwhelmed this otherwise pristine village of about 1,000 people. Peaches and cherries rot on trees, infested with insect life drawn by the smell. Fields lie unharvested, contaminated by toxic muck. Every day, another 100 or so tons of garbage arrive from nearby Zhengzhou, a provincial capital of 8 million.

"Life here went from heaven to hell in an instant," says lifelong resident Wang Xiuhua, swatting away clouds of mosquitoes and flies. The 78-year-old woman suddenly coughs uncontrollably and says the landfill gases inflame her bronchitis.

As more Chinese ride the nation's economic boom, a torrent of garbage is one result. Cities are bursting at the seams, and their officials struggle to cope.

The amount of paper, plastic and other garbage has more than tripled in two decades to about 300 million tons a year, according to Nie Yongfeng, a waste management expert at Beijing's Tsinghua University.

Americans are still way ahead of China in garbage; a population less than a quarter the size of China's 1.3 billion generated 254 million tons of garbage in 2007, a third of which is recycled or composted, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. But for China, the problem represents a rapid turnabout from a generation ago, when families, then largely rural and poor, used and reused everything.

"Trash was never complicated before, because we didn't have supermarkets, we didn't have fancy packaging and endless things to buy," said Nie. "Now suddenly, the government is panicking about the mountains of garbage piling up with no place to put it all."

In Zhanglidong, villagers engage in shouting matches with drivers and sometimes try to bodily block their garbage trucks coming from Zhengzhou, 20 miles away.

"Zhengzhou is spotless because their trash is dumped into our village," says Li Qiaohong, who blames it for her 5-year-old son's eczema.

Li's family is one of a few who live within 100 meters (300 feet) of the landfill, separated from it by a fence. These families get 100 yuan (\$15) a month in government compensation.

The dump has poisoned not just the air and ground, but relationships. Villagers say they were never consulted, and suspect their Communist Party officials were paid to accept the landfill.

In China, especially in rural regions, there is often no recourse once local officials make a decision. The villagers say not only were their petitions ignored, but they were warned by the Zhengzhou police to stop protesting or face punishment.

"We villagers were too naive ... we didn't know what a landfill was," said Li. "If we had known earlier about all the pollution it would cause, we would have done everything possible to stop the construction process. Now it's too late."

Elsewhere, thousands of farmers in the central province of Hubei clashed with police last year over illegal dumping near their homes. A person filming the clash died after being beaten by police.

Protests in cities are driving trash to the countryside.

Residents in central Beijing swarmed the offices of the Ministry of Environment last year, protesting the stench from a landfill and plans for a new incinerator there. In July, officials scrapped the incinerator plan and closed the landfill four years early.

In eastern Beijing, local officials invested millions of dollars to make the Gao An Tun landfill and incinerator one of a handful in China to meet global health standards. That was after 200,000 residents petitioned for a year about the smell.

"Our standard of living is improving, so it's natural that more and more of us begin to fight for a better quality of life," says Zhang Jianhua, 67, one of the petitioners.

"Widespread media coverage embarrassed the local government, so they finally decided to take action," she says.

After millennia as a farming society, China expects to be majority urban in five years.

Busy families are shifting from fresh to packaged foods, consumption of which rose 10.8 percent a year from 2000 to 2008, well above the 4.2 percent average in Asia, according to the Hong Kong Trade Development Council. By 2013, the packaged-food market is expected to reach \$195 billion, up 74 percent from last year.

At least 85 percent of China's seven billion tons of trash is in landfills, much of it in unlicensed dumps in the countryside. Most have only thin linings of plastic or fiberglass. Rain drips heavy metals, ammonia, and bacteria into the groundwater and soil, and the decomposing stew sends out methane and carbon dioxide.

Regulations allow incinerators to emit 10 times the level of dioxins permitted in the U.S., and these release cancer-causing dioxins and other poisons, according to a Chinese government study.

"If the government doesn't step up efforts to solve our garbage woes, China will likely face an impending health crisis in the coming decade," warns Liu Yangsheng, an expert in waste management at Peking University.

In Zhanglidong, resident Zheng Dongxiao says the village's only water well is polluted and causing chronic ulcers.

Wang Ling, a spokesman for the Zhengzhou Ministry of Environment, said the landfill has a polyethylene liner to protect the ground beneath. "Test results of the local soil, water, and air quality, in 2006 and this year, showed that everything was in line with national standards," he told The Associated Press.

Residents say the liner has tears and only covers a fraction of the landfill.

The government knows its garbage disposal will always draw complaints, says Liu. "What they need to do is invest more money into building and maintaining better plants."

That remains a tall order in a country bent on growth, where economic planners hold more sway than environmental regulators and are loath to spend scarce funds on waste management.

[L.A. Times editorial, Monday, Oct. 12, 2009:](#)

**The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is feeling the heat
The business group's stand on climate legislation has cost it members and credibility.**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce touts itself as the world's largest business federation, boasting 3 million members. Er, make that 2,999,996. And falling.

The chamber has been beset by embarrassing headlines recently, as large companies that oppose the organization's hostility toward climate-change legislation head for the exits. The very public departures of three utilities -- San Francisco-based Pacific Gas & Electric, Albuquerque-based PNM Resources and Chicago-based Exelon Corp. -- were followed by Dear John letters to the chamber from Nike and Apple (Nike will keep its membership but resigned from the chamber's board of directors).

The chamber has long been a standard-bearer for polluters, but as Congress has gotten closer to approving legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it has become increasingly combative. The last straw for the chamber's defectors was its nonsensical proposal in August that the Environmental Protection Agency stage a "Scopes monkey trial" on global warming science -- a political stunt that annoyed corporate leaders who take the problem seriously.

The climate bill now in the Senate would benefit some businesses while costing others, posing a headache for associations such as the chamber. PG&E, for example, stands to be a big winner because it generates a great deal of carbon-free hydropower and has invested heavily in wind and solar energy; nuclear-power giant Exelon also could make a killing on carbon credits. Defections by a handful of such companies won't change the chamber's stance on the climate bill, but the ensuing controversy has, mercifully, prompted its chief executive, Tom Donohue, to tone down his rhetoric.

Backers of the cap-and-trade climate bill argue that it would create green jobs and ultimately benefit the economy; opponents are equally enamored of predicting economic doom. There are too many variables and unforeseeable impacts for such forecasts to be very useful. What's practically certain is that reinventing our energy infrastructure would be expensive, but cheaper than cleaning up the mess that would result if we didn't.

There are two ways of handling the coming climate changes, which, according to a recent U.S. government review of the available science, will jeopardize water supplies, destroy transportation infrastructure, blight crops and harm human health: We can impose a price on carbon and thus make those who produce or benefit from it pay a little now, or we can force all taxpayers to fund the far higher cost of repairing the damage later. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is trying to sell the latter approach. Don't buy it.

[San Diego Union-Tribune commentary, Saturday, October 10, 2009:](#)

State not meeting Salton Sea responsibilities

By Michael Cohen

The Legislature and much of California remain locked in a fight over the future of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. Not so long ago, there was a similar fight over California's other major water source, the Colorado River.

Six years ago today, Southern California urban and agricultural water agencies signed an historic agreement that reallocated billions of gallons of California's share of the Colorado River. The agreement, signed in the waning days of Gov. Gray Davis's administration and in the face of great pressure from the federal government and the other six states that depend upon Colorado River water, implemented the largest transfer of water from farmers to urban users ever seen.

To date, the Imperial Valley has sent nearly a quarter of a million acre-feet of water to San Diego County — enough to meet the annual water demand of 2 million people. San Diego has paid more than \$70 million, adjusted for inflation, for this water, and spent almost as much again to transport it. Over the next six years, as the annual transfer volume increases, Imperial will send more than twice as much water to San Diego.

One of the biggest impediments to signing the 2003 agreement was responsibility for impacts to the Salton Sea. The sea, the largest lake in California, boasts the second-highest diversity of bird species in the U.S. and at times feeds and shelters hundreds of thousands of birds.

The water Imperial sends to San Diego was to come from improvements in efficiency, such as lining canals and pump-back systems on farm fields. But, in a cruel irony, such efficiency would come directly at the expense of water flowing to the Salton Sea. Less water would mean the lake — which has no outlet — would shrink, degrading water quality and exposing thousands of acres of former lake bed to the harsh desert winds, kicking up dust that could impair human health and crop production downwind. To offset these impacts, the water agencies agreed to fallow farmland instead of lining canals, and to send additional water to the sea to make up for the losses caused by fallowing, until 2018.

For its part, the state committed to develop a restoration plan for the sea and deliver this plan to the Legislature for authorization and funding. The state also committed to assume responsibility for air-quality management and other environmental impacts, once the water agencies had spent about \$156 million (adjusted for inflation) on such costs. The state's liability was later estimated to exceed \$800 million.

Six years later, where are we? The surface of the Salton Sea has fallen about 2.5 feet, decreasing the lake's maximum depth by about 5 percent. The sea has shrunk, exposing some 7,800 acres of former lake bed. The total volume of the sea has dropped by almost 8 percent, salinity has increased by about 8 percent, and overall water quality has declined. The corvina and other sportfish that used to attract anglers disappeared several years ago. Tilapia are the only fish still abundant in the sea, but eventually they too will succumb to the increasingly poor water quality.

California met its requirement to develop a restoration plan and submitted it to the Legislature in May 2007. Senate Bill 187, enacted last year to authorize some initial “no regrets” activities at the sea, marks the only new legislation on behalf of the sea. Yet California's recurring budget problems have delayed even these limited activities. Six years after the signing of the agreement, the state has spent some \$20 million on consultants and meetings, but has almost nothing on the ground to show for it. In the next several weeks, the state and the water agencies will install six air-quality monitoring stations around the sea, to start to monitor dust emissions. The Torres-Martinez tribe has constructed an impressive 85-acre wetland on the north end of the sea, and the federal government built a 100-acre wetland at the south end, though that's in danger of being abandoned by the end of the year. Six years after the historic agreement, that's all we have on the ground at the Salton Sea.

What we don't have is a feasible long-term plan for the sea. We don't have a governance structure for developing and implementing a plan. We don't have a sign that the state is serious about the future of the sea. In 2018 — in less than a decade — the sea will begin a rapid and catastrophic decline, and the state will be in crisis mode yet again.

The water transfer and the Salton Sea were to be a test case of how California could move water while protecting public health, local economies, and dependent ecosystems. Six years later, California has done little to instill confidence that it takes its responsibilities seriously, or that it will take the actions necessary to protect public health and rescue imperiled ecosystems.

Cohen is a senior associate with the Pacific Institute and was a member of the state's Salton Sea Advisory Committee. He has written several reports and articles about the Salton Sea, which are available at www.pacinst.org.

[Washington Post commentary, Sunday, October 11, 2009:](#)

Out of Mom's Car, Onto the Metrobus

By Jenifer Joy Madden

Parents are supposed to teach their kids to rely on themselves and to use resources wisely. Doing that could also spare them hours in traffic, especially in places such as Tysons Corner, near where I live. Yet, hauling kids around in lots of vehicles, all going the same place at the same time, has somehow become our default. I wanted to change my ways.

So now that my son is older and has a phone, my goal for the new school year was for my son and his best friend, Jason, to learn to ride the public bus from their high school in Fairfax home to Vienna.

The first step was to get buy-in from Jason's mom. While discussing the details of a carpooling arrangement, I offhandedly dropped the notion. Jason's mom -- who's also my pal -- blinked once and said, "Sure, why not?"

Next, it was time to tell the kids. We couched it as another test of their mettle. After all, if these 15-year-olds could swing at objects flying 90 miles an hour and get whacked by titanium lacrosse sticks, they could walk to a bus stop and ride a few miles across town.

Then came the planning. We sat down and googled Washington Metrobus. At <http://wmata.com>, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Web site, we clicked the "Bus" tab. Then we zoomed in on the "Maps" page, which shows the Virginia routes in vivid colors. There is a bus stop in front of the school, but we saw that it would save time if the boys walked a quarter-mile to the line that runs through Vienna. A few more clicks found the fare: \$1.35 in cash, or \$1.25 with a SmarTrip card.

Finally, it was Bus Day. The boys decided not to push it by taking the first bus after dismissal. But they apparently missed the next one by trying to talk an upperclassman into driving them to the stop. All I know is that at 4:25 p.m., they called to say the 4:13 p.m. mysteriously "wasn't there."

To avoid resorting to the car, I sprang into action. I asked my son to give me the bus stop number, which is listed on the Metro signpost. I plugged the number into NextBus, a wmata.com service that uses a global-positioning system to predict the next bus's arrival time. Alarming, it showed an 84-minute wait. Assuming I had mistyped, I looked up the next bus on the schedule and told them to catch the 4:57. Then I hung up and hoped.

At 5:07 came the text: "We're on the bus." The phone rang 25 minutes later. In that short span, they had made it all the way down Maple Avenue and walked six-tenths of a mile to Jason's house. My son's voice was happy and relaxed. "For half the trip, we were the only ones on the bus."

What can we learn from this small miracle? First and foremost, that public transit works. Second, that it's easy to figure it out. Third, that taking the bus pays off.

By driving 3.68 miles to and from Jason's instead of 15 miles round-trip to school, I used about one-quarter the gasoline and sent three-quarters less pollution into the air. Based on gas prices at \$2.59 a gallon, my 25-mpg car used 38 cents worth of gas. Adding that to the bus fare, my son's new commute totaled \$1.73. That's only 18 cents more than the \$1.55 in gas I spend on the usual routine. Not a bad deal to reclaim a productive hour of my life.

There were gains for the boys, too. For one thing, they got exercise. Walking that mile to and from the bus happens to be the daily dose of activity recommended for teens by the American Heart Association. Plus, getting outside in the fresh air is an antidote for what author Richard Louv terms "nature deficit disorder." Louv, in his book "Last Child in the Woods," also argues that the leash we have on our kids is way too tight. When we allow them to be more self-reliant and self-propelled, they gain pride and satisfaction.

The bus can be a boon to anyone. It behooves us all to go online and find our local line so we have it as a transportation option when we need it. If there is no bus, then speak up. In Fairfax County, staffers want to hear from you because they're finalizing a 10-year plan for bus service. Public meetings will be held all over the county during the next several weeks. Information and a comment form are at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fcdot/tdp.htm>.

As for the boys, by their second bus trip, they had it down cold. They called to say they were at Jason's even before I thought they had left school.

The writer represents the Hunter Mill district on the Fairfax County Transportation Advisory Commission.

Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Oct. 11, 2009:

Let's go nuclear

Water, jobs and a cleaner environment. Wouldn't it be great if we could accomplish all three for our San Joaquin Valley? Believe it or not, a nuclear power generating plant on the west side of our Valley would do it.

Such a plant would economically power a facility that desalinates the unusable water available. The construction of the nuclear plant itself will provide many jobs.

The economical power produced would attract new business providing more jobs. An operating nuclear power plant provides zip for greenhouse gasses. It provides electrical power 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, whether the wind blows and/or the sun shines or not.

Concern for the nuclear waste is legitimate. Let's recycle it, just like the French do. The pipeline for equipment and material to build a nuclear power plant is getting plugged. China, Russia, India and several foreign nations are pursuing nuclear plants with a passion.

It's time to take a good look at the California moratorium against nuclear power plants and get serious about building some. Let's get off our reliance on foreign oil from countries that do not like us, only our money.

Dick Caglia, Fresno