

Bill would use high-speed rail funds for Hwy. 99

By John Ellis, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, Feb. 17, 2011

Rep. Devin Nunes will introduce legislation today that would give California the option of taking \$2.8 billion in federal funds slated for high-speed rail and instead use the cash to improve Highway 99.

The bill specifies that the money "may be used by [California] for any project or activity to improve or maintain California State Route 99 between the cities of Sacramento and Bakersfield."

"This has always been the priority corridor for the Valley," the Visalia Republican said. "There has always been a bipartisan approach to widen the highway and [improve air quality](#). This bill finally gives the state the option to get it done."

Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin, a key high-speed rail supporter, complimented Nunes "for thinking out of the box and making sure those dollars stay in the Valley."

Still, Swearengin said, the key is making sure the line is built.

"I think that our congressional delegation should be focused on streamlining the federal permitting process for high-speed rail in California," she said. "That would lower the cost of the train system and still allow us the economic boost that we know is going to come from high-speed rail."

Nunes is hoping for local support to sway California's two Democratic senators -- Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. If his bill makes it out of the Republican-controlled House, it would likely face a rockier road in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

Republican Reps. Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield and Jeff Denham of Atwater have signed on as co-sponsors, Nunes said. Rep. Jim Costa, a Fresno Democrat and longtime high-speed rail supporter, declined to comment.

The money from the Obama administration is coming from federal stimulus funds and currently is specifically slated for high-speed rail. But the state also must meet a series of deadlines to keep the federal money. One of those deadlines is starting construction by late 2012.

Nunes stressed that his bill isn't mandatory, but could be a vital fallback position if the state can't meet the federal deadlines, which he said was "a high likelihood."

State High Speed Rail Authority officials declined to comment.

There is some wariness of the bill, which some feel could be a first step to derailing the high-speed rail project. Nunes himself is skeptical of its chances.

Swearengin said she "takes the bill at face value" and says it's "not a bad idea at all," but "I don't think we should take our eye off the ball of pursuing high-speed rail with everything we've got."

House Republicans seek to block many EPA rules

Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers

In the Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Thursday, February 17, 2011

WASHINGTON — Congressional Republicans this week added amendments to a spending bill that would knock out environmental protections for air, water and wilderness.

Among the amendments, which fill hundreds of pages, are ones that would block the Environmental Protection Agency from limiting hazardous pollutants at power plants, from studying whether the farm herbicide atrazine has health hazards and from tightening rules on toxic coal ash. Many of the amendments would strip the agency of funds to carry out pollution restrictions that industries have fought.

Tea party backers in the House of Representatives support the provisions. They could win support from other Republicans and pass the GOP-majority chamber this week. The Senate,

where Democrats have an edge, is likely to block most of them. Even so, the amendments reveal how far many House Republicans are prepared to go in trying to stop environmental regulations.

A bipartisan poll released Wednesday suggested that a large majority of Americans strongly oppose such efforts, particularly where air pollution is concerned. The survey, sponsored by the American Lung Association and conducted by two polling firms, one Republican and one Democratic, found that 69 percent of voters favored the EPA updating the Clean Air Act to put stricter limits on air pollution, 26 percent opposed it and 5 percent had no opinion or didn't answer.

An amendment by Rep. John Carter, R-Texas, would block money for the EPA to enforce a new rule that will cut toxic emissions of arsenic, cadmium, lead and other pollutants from cement plants. The toxic pollutants are linked to cancer, respiratory illness and other health hazards. The rule also would reduce emissions of soot, which is linked to heart attacks and lung diseases, including asthma.

Rep. Ralph Hall, R-Texas, the chairman of the Science and Technology Committee, proposed asking the National Academy of Sciences to spend two years studying whether arsenic, lead and other toxic pollutants from large industries are harmful. He'd block the implementation of an upcoming EPA rule to regulate emissions from the boilers that provide industrial heat and power until the study was finished.

Tea party supporter Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, offered an amendment that would strip the EPA of money to finalize the rule.

Tea party-backed Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Va., proposed blocking funds for the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers to carry out an Obama administration policy that requires closer scrutiny of mountaintop removal mining permits.

David Goldston, the director of government affairs at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group, said at a briefing that the dozens of amendments would produce a significant rollback of public protections. He called them a "free-for-all for any industry that has had a problem with how it was treated under the law."

American Lung Association Bipartisan Poll Shows Strong Public Support for Lifesaving Clean Air Act

By American Lung Association

In the Sacramento Bee, Thursday, February

WASHINGTON - Just one day before the U.S. House of Representatives votes on a bill that would severely impact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ability to protect public health from air pollution, the American Lung Association has released a new bipartisan survey examining public views of EPA's updating and enforcing clean air standards. The bipartisan survey, which was conducted by Democratic polling firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, and Republican firm Ayres, McHenry & Associates, finds that likely voters support the Clean Air Act and have sharply different opinions than the Members of Congress who are working to limit EPA's authority to update and enforce air pollution standards, including on carbon dioxide.

Three out of four voters support the EPA setting tougher standards on specific air pollutants, including mercury, smog and carbon dioxide, as well as setting higher fuel efficiency standards for heavy duty trucks. Exposure to air pollution causes thousands of premature deaths and asthma attacks and millions of dollars in healthcare costs.

Most relevant to the current debate in Congress, this new survey found that 68 percent of voters oppose Congressional action that impedes the EPA from updating clean air standards generally and 64 percent oppose Congressional efforts to stop the EPA from updating standards on carbon dioxide. Even after a balanced debate that included the language used by supporters of Congressional action to limit the EPA, a 60-percent majority continues to support the EPA on carbon dioxide regulation.

"Despite the strong attacks on the Clean Air Act coming from Congress and industry, it's clear that the public values measures to protect public health," said Paul Billings, vice president for national policy and advocacy at the American Lung Association. "Voters clearly recognize and respect the role of the EPA in protecting their families from breathing toxic air, and they don't want Congress to interfere with the EPA's authority to take action when lives are clearly at stake."

The results of the survey are timely, as the U.S. House of Representatives is preparing to vote on a proposed funding bill, H.R. 1, for the federal government for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2011. The House has proposed cutting the EPA's budget by one third, which will drastically impact the EPA's ability to save lives and improve the health of children, older adults, and millions of other Americans by protecting the public health from air pollution. H.R. 1 specifically prevents the EPA from enforcing or issuing rules under the Clean Air Act to address carbon pollution. Amendments have been filed to block updating air pollution health standards and the cleanup of toxic air pollution, including mercury from industrial facilities. In addition, several pieces of separate legislation are under consideration that would block the EPA from implementing the Clean Air Act.

Key poll results indicate the level of concern expressed by voters regarding their right to breathe healthy air:

69 percent think the EPA should update Clean Air Act standards with stricter limits on air pollution;

68 percent feel that Congress should not stop the EPA from updating Clean Air Act standards;

And a bipartisan 69 percent majority believe that EPA scientists, rather than Congress, should set pollution standards.

In a memo sent to the American Lung Association from Mike Bocian and Andrew Bauman of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, and Jon McHenry and Dan Judy of Ayres of McHenry and Associates, the pollsters wrote: "The survey clearly indicates that voters strongly trust the EPA to deal with clean air standards more than Congress. A bipartisan 69 percent majority believes that EPA scientists, rather than Congress, should set pollution standards. This is despite opposing language arguing that our elected representatives in Congress would do a better job than 'unelected bureaucrats at the EPA.'"

The survey also tested messages currently being used in Congress around action that would prevent EPA from updating air pollution standards. Half of all respondents heard balanced messages about updating clean air standards, while the other half of survey respondents were asked balanced questions about carbon pollution. In both instances, majorities of at least 60 percent said that Congress should not stop EPA from updating these standards, including Independents by a two to one majority. The survey demonstrates that when it comes to protecting EPA's ability to update and enforce clean air standards, Independents and moderate voters are more in line with Democrats and liberals.

"The Clean Air Act has had strong bipartisan support for the past 40 years. In 2010 alone, enforcing the Clean Air Act is estimated to have prevented 160,000 premature deaths," continued Billings. "We are deeply concerned that the U.S. House of Representatives' proposed spending cuts – as well as various legislative proposals already introduced – will roll back the progress we've made to protect the health of American families."

The full survey, along with slides and a memo from Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and Ayres, McHenry and Associates, can be found [here](#).

Methodology: The survey was conducted by polling firms Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Ayres, McHenry and Associates. Their firms conducted a national survey of 1021 likely voters reached by both landline and cell phone between February 7 and 14, 2011. The margin of error for the full sample is 3.1 percent. Margin of error for a half-sample is 4.4 percent.

About the American Lung Association

Now in its second century, the American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. With your generous support, the

American Lung Association is "Fighting for Air" through research, education and advocacy. For more information about the American Lung Association, a Charity Navigator Four Star Charity and holder of the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Guide Seal, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or visit www.LungUSA.org.

About Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner is a global leader in public opinion research and strategic consulting. GQR helps elect progressive candidates in the U.S. and around the world, helps NGOs advance their issues, and helps companies understand their reputations and key audiences.

About Ayres, McHenry & Associates

Ayres, McHenry and Associates is a national public opinion and public affairs research firm, providing research and strategic advice for corporations, associations, and Republican candidates for public office. The firm's public work helps craft creative conservative political messages for the 21st century.

SOURCE American Lung Association