

Info sought on power plant plan

By Tim Moran, staff writer

The Modesto Bee, March 3, 2004

The proposed 1,120-megawatt Tesla Power Project near Tracy is not quite ready for prime time, according to a committee of the California Energy Commission.

The committee reported late last week that it needs more information on air quality and water elements of the \$600 million project.

A new hearing has been scheduled for 11 a.m. April 8 at the Tracy Community Center, 300 E. 10th St.

The natural gas-fired turbine power plant would be one of the largest in the state, and would be within 10 miles of a 1,100-megawatt plant already licensed by the commission but not yet operating.

The Tesla project would be on 60 acres of farmland near Midway Road, southeast of Interstate 580. The site is in eastern Alameda County, near the San Joaquin County border.

The plant could be operational by late 2006 if the evidence requests do not cause significant delays. Once a license is approved, the applicant has five years to build.

The project is proposed by Midway Power LLC, a subsidiary of Florida Power & Light Group-FPL Energy.

The commission's committee wants more testimony on ammonia and particulate air emissions from the project and the water source for cooling the plant.

Like Calpine's East Altamont Energy Center, the other large power plant in the area, the Tesla project poses jurisdictional air quality issues.

Both power plant sites are in Alameda County, and fall under the jurisdiction of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

But because they are near the San Joaquin County border, experts say, a significant amount of air emissions will affect the valley.

Midway Power has agreed to pay \$957,751 to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for air quality benefit programs in or near Tracy.

In addition, the company has offered to give the city of Tracy an additional \$600,000 for air quality programs -- an offer that the commission has incorporated in its recommendations.

Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the valley air district, said the funds are to be used for programs such as converting school buses to cleaner burning natural gas; replacing gas lawn mowers with electric ones; and replacing older diesel irrigation pumps with newer models that use cleaner technology.

The clean air programs would more than offset the added emissions that the new plant would produce, Presto said.

Tracy shoe store owner Robert Sarvey said he was pleased with the concessions, but he wants more.

Sarvey, who intervened in the Tesla licensing case, has also fought other power plant proposals in the area. He said his wife and three children suffer from asthma.

"My intent is to stop the project. But if not, I want to get the most mitigation I can get for my city," Sarvey said Tuesday. "We like our town, and we don't want to move."

In addition to the air emission issues, Sarvey has raised questions about the water source, destruction of kit fox habitat and getting Midway Power to pay for hazardous-material response trucks.

Midway has agreed to add 435 acres of land around the plant for habitat and buy a water tender for the region's fire departments.

The water issue involves Midway's plan to use water that normally would flow down the California Aqueduct to Kern County.

State water policy calls for the use of recycled water when feasible, and the Energy Commission staff wants Midway to look into using water coming out of the Tracy sewage treatment plant. The sewer water option would require an 11-mile pipeline.

A third option is a dry cooling system, a more expensive alternative, but one that the commission staff believes should be investigated as well.

Scott Busa of Florida Power & Light said the air and water issues did not pose a significant obstacle for the Tesla project.

Busa added, however, that the decision to build will depend on overall conditions imposed on the plant, and whether the company can obtain long-term power contracts with financially sound clients.

Foul odor traced back to refinery

By Simon Read, staff writer

Tri-Valley Herald, March 3, 2004

Something foul in the air wafted through Contra Costa and Alameda counties Tuesday, prompting many residents to call local emergency services and report the powerful stench of rotten eggs in their area.

The first calls came in to Contra Costa Health Services about 9 a.m., said Jim Hattum, a hazardous materials specialist. A public health advisory was issued, though officials did not believe the bad smell posed any threat.

A spokeswoman with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District said investigators and a roving van had been dispatched to the Martinez area to locate the source of the odor. By 12:44 p.m., an "all-clear" had been declared. Blame for the odiferous offense was placed on a reduced sulfur compound believed to have been released from the Tesoro refinery near Martinez.

The stench, powerful as it was, also twinged the noses of residents in Danville, San Ramon and Dublin. In San Ramon, it made itself known at about 10 a.m.

"We got quite a few calls from all over," said Polly Spofforth, dispatch supervisor for the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District. "It was hard to count exactly how many, but we got about 40 or 50. We didn't have anyone say they had any health problems."

The wide-ranging odor also made its way into Pleasanton. The Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Department, however, only received one complaint, a department spokeswoman said.

The reduced sulfur compound, or mercaptans, believed to be responsible for the nasal assault is a product of crude oil processing. Hattum said depending on the compound's concentration, it can smell like anything from sewage to rotten cabbage to a skunk.

Hattum said it is believed the compound was released during the cleanup of materials at the Tesoro refinery. A refinery spokesman, however, said it is not known what caused the smell.

"We did receive a number of odor complaints from Concord and the surrounding areas," said refinery spokesman Jon Ballesteros, "but we didn't experience any emergencies or operational upsets that would cause a release."

Refinery officials reviewed their equipment and initiated an investigation into the plant's operations to determine the odor's source, Ballesteros said. The review was done in conjunction with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and Contra Costa County's Hazardous Material Division.

"We can't pinpoint the actual cause of the odor," he said. "There was no leak that we found, and there were no cleanups that I am aware of."

Ballesteros said all the refinery could do was take steps to ensure such an incident doesn't happen again.

"We regret if any of our operations had an impact on the community," he added. "Hopefully, there won't be anything else."

Wire services contributed to this report.

[Community Voices, The Bakersfield Californian, March 2, 2004](#)

Reforestation best for fire area

By Paul Horgan, Weldon

The Forest Service has proposed a plan to restore the habitat of endangered species and wildlife in the Lake Isabella region. Clean water and fish habitat, as well as the forest, will be restored far faster than if left alone.

A side benefit of restoration would be the reduction of greenhouse gases. Thriving planted new trees will absorb carbon dioxide, which causes global warming.

Restoration was proposed to take place on only 238 acres of the 4,270 acre Burnt Ridge area. It suffered 100 percent tree mortality and the worst erosion.

This area is still high in fuel load from the dead trees. If left untreated, it will be at high risk of catastrophic wildfire for the next 20 to 30 years. Only dead trees were going to be removed by the Forest Service. Some standing dead trees were going to be left, as well as some on the ground, for species habitation, ground cover and mulch.

Replanting with native species would speed up the process of reforestation by 200 to 300 years.

With all these benefits, environmental groups should applaud the plan. Unfortunately, they do not. A lawsuit to stop any restoration was filed by such environmental groups as the Sierra Club, Earth Island Institute, Center for Biological Diversity, Heartwood Foundation and Sequoia Forest Keepers.

One of their experts, a fire ecologist, cited a report by forest hydrologist Robert L. Beschta to support the claims of the environmental groups.

This study was not done in the Kern River Drainage, but in the Pacific Northwest, which has an extremely different climate. The report has not been peer reviewed.

Yet this is somehow sound science because it is presented by righteous environmental groups.

These groups filed a motion to strike the testimony of Tule River/Hot Springs District Fire Management Officer Paul Gibbs and thereby discredit him.

Gibbs has a Bachelor of Science degree in forestry and has been a professional forester for 14 years; has been working with fire and fuels for 17 seasons; is a certified and qualified incident commander, type 3; prescribed fire burn boss, type 1; fire effects monitor; wildland fire use manager, as well as holding other various firefighting and fuels management positions.

For some reason, the environmental groups feel his credentials do not qualify him as an expert. They could not be more wrong. While Gibbs has been working in the Sequoia forest every day, their experts probably have been in far-off courtrooms. They spent, at most, a few days, perhaps only a few hours, in the local forest.

Yet somehow in that brief period they could determine the true condition of the forest better than Forest Service scientists, each one of whom have worked and studied in the Sequoia for more than a decade.

Please write a letter and let your elected representatives know that we want them to make sure our forests are actively managed and restored to health and to stop the endless lawsuits that are killing our forests as well as wasting vast amounts of tax dollars.

Paul Horgan of Weldon is a conservationist and retired video equipment installer.

[Political news addressing air quality:](#)

Costa overwhelms Quigley in heated congressional race

By Cyndee Fontana and Barbara Anderson

The Fresno Bee

(Updated Wednesday, March 3, 2004, 7:27 AM)

After months of trading political body blows in a free-spending campaign that soured some voters, former state Sen. Jim Costa quickly outdistanced Lisa Quigley in the Democratic race for the 20th Congressional District.

With 95.7% of precincts reporting early today, Costa had 73.4% of the vote compared to Quigley's 26.6%. The trend was apparent so early that Quigley, the former chief of staff to retiring Rep. Cal Dooley, D-Fresno, conceded about 30 minutes after the polls closed.

Quigley, who said she would support Costa in November, said name recognition factored heavily in his lopsided victory.

[She said her campaign successfully raised issues such as education, health care and air quality.](#)

"I think my campaign was textbook," Quigley said. "There's nothing I would change other than the outcome."

On the Republican side, state Sen. Roy Ashburn of Bakersfield sprinted to a mammoth lead over Kingsburg businessman Gino Martorana. Ashburn was pulling 79.9% of the vote compared to Martorana's 20.1%.

The primary winners face off in November to replace Dooley, who decided to retire after 14 years in Congress.

Costa, however, will be the favorite because the majority of district voters are Democrats. The 20th District includes all of Kings County and parts of Fresno and Kern counties.

Costa, celebrating with supporters at Grizzlies Stadium in Fresno, called his landslide win over Quigley a "sweet victory" that showed voters want a congressman with a record of Valley accomplishments.

He also said they were too smart to be swayed by what he described as a "campaign of sleaze and distortions" waged by Quigley.

While the Republican race was understated, the two Democrats collectively spent more than \$1.1 million in a campaign that often turned negative.

[Costa, 51, traded heavily on his 24 years in the state Legislature and a legacy that included writing three successful statewide water bonds, co-authoring the Three Strikes sentencing law and helping create the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.](#)

[Quigley, the 38-year-old married mother of two, leaned on Dooley's endorsement while positioning herself as a "mom on a mission" to put every child in preschool by 2020, expand access to health care and clean up the Valley's dirty air basin.](#)

But the campaign frequently turned ugly, with Costa lampooning Quigley's residency and Quigley raking up Costa's 1986 arrest for soliciting a prostitute. Costa questioned Quigley's ties to the district while she torched his voting record and called him a pawn of special interests.

More than a dozen voters at the polls Tuesday criticized the tone of the campaign. Some were particularly turned off by Quigley's commercial, days before the election, that raised Costa's arrest.

Others complained that Costa attacked first with a radio advertisement claiming that Quigley didn't live in Fresno. And they said there was power in a campaign rooted in issues affecting children and families.

Edward Shanahan, 50, a Hanford resident who works for Kings County parks and grounds, said he voted for Costa.

He added: "The ads didn't help me make my decision, but I didn't like it when they turned negative, especially Lisa Quigley.

"I feel like if they are going to run for office, they should be better people than that. I would rather see them focus on the issues than sling mud at each other."

Gary Dias, 56, of Fresno said he was turned off by Quigley's negative campaigning. Dias said: "I thought she's doing a cheap shot."

In the 18th Congressional District -- which includes most of Stanislaus and Merced counties and small slices of San Joaquin, Madera and Fresno counties -- two Republicans were battling for the right to challenge incumbent Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, in November.

With 91.1% of precincts reporting, retired general contractor Charles Pringle of Tracy was ahead with 68.3%; consultant Audrey Redmond of Fresno lagged with 31.7% of the vote.

Cardoza -- like incumbent Reps. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, and Devin Nunes, R-Visalia -- had no opposition within his party in the primary.

Radanovich represents the 19th Congressional District, which encompasses a sizable chunk of Stanislaus County, most of Madera County, some of Fresno County, and all of Mariposa and Tuolumne counties. He will face Democrat James Lex Bufford, a Madera businessman, and Green Party candidate Larry R. Mullen, a Fresno teacher, in November.

In the 21st Congressional District, which includes all of Tulare County and a swath of Fresno County, Nunes will square off with Democrat Fred B. Davis, a retired probation officer, in the fall.

Rubio ousts Parra

The Bakersfield Californian

March 3, 2004

Christine Bedell, Californian staff writer

Big change is in store for the Kern County Board of Supervisors as legislative aide Michael Rubio defeated veteran 5th District Supervisor Pete Parra in a landslide victory Tuesday night. With 67 of 80 precincts reporting, Rubio had 61 percent of the vote compared to 39 percent for Parra.

Screams erupted among Rubio supporters at the Carpenters union hall in downtown Bakersfield when, at about 10 p.m., it was clear Rubio had won.

"I'm obviously excited and overjoyed," Rubio said as backers cheered his name. "It goes to show anyone out there that dedication and discipline can get you where you want to go."

A few blocks away at the Laborers union hall, an at-times tearful Parra said he'll find new ways to serve the public when his term expires in nine months. He wished Rubio luck and offered to help him transition into the job.

"The people have spoken and it's time for me to turn to a new chapter in my life," Parra said. "I'll have more quality time with my wife and children and continue to work hard for the 5th District and the rest of Kern County."

He said Rubio "worked hard and ran a good campaign."

[Rubio, 26, an aide to state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, will be sworn in in January. He's already outlined a slew of new ideas for improving air quality, cleaning up blighted neighborhoods and reinvigorating Neighborhood Watch programs.](#)

He could also prove to be a dissenting voice. Florez has butted heads with the board over county redistricting, air improvement and Child Protective Services issues.

The 5th District includes part of downtown Bakersfield, east Bakersfield, Arvin and Lamont.

Rubio supporter Wendy Wayne said a hardworking, grass-roots campaign won him the job.

"It's the one-to-one contact, I have no doubt in my mind," Wayne said. "Michael and his supporters have walked to 15,000 households. There was real interaction, (Rubio volunteers asking), 'What issues are a concern to you?'"

Parra, 59, was first elected to the board in 1996 after running the county's Employers' Training Resource agency for 22 years.

This year he largely ran on his record, including projects he helped shepherd and contacts he developed.

Rubio argued that the 5th District needed more active and innovative leadership and the Board of Supervisors needed to do less business behind closed doors and better prioritize spending.

The race turned bitter in January when Rubio demanded Parra reveal who has donated to his family's charity and where the money went. He said voters should know if the foundation financed political activities.

Parra said the Parra Foundation only funded charitable endeavors: Christmas toys for needy children and meals for volunteers who handed them out.

Rubio blamed Parra for not taking a stronger stand against the nonprofit Desert Counseling Clinic, which overbilled the county millions of dollars.

Parra fired back by accusing Rubio of having no public service record, making promises he can't keep and being set up to run by Florez, a political rival of Parra's.

Late in the race, Parra ran a negative television ad pointing out that Rubio has only lived in the district for six months. The ad also said that a couple years ago, Florez and others were accused of libeling an Assembly candidate in Palm Springs.

Other folks got caught in the fray.

Last week, a local pastor accused Rubio of manipulating a 92-year-old parishioner into letting his volunteers sign her name to an endorsement letter sent to voters.

Rubio said the woman knew what she was doing; her caretaker said Rubio didn't mislead anyone.

Also last week, the District Attorney's office was asked to investigate whether prominent attorney and Parra supporter David Torres did anything wrong when he registered to vote in the 5th District using his business address while living in another district.

Torres denied any wrongdoing.

And in a story published Election Day, California Highway Commissioner D.O. "Spike" Helmick told The Californian that local CHP officials "fixed" a traffic ticket issued to Rubio in 2001.

He said Rubio participated by giving a sergeant -- or leaving for the sergeant to pick up -- a copy of his ticket.

Rubio denied the allegation and complained about the issue coming up on the eve of the election. Someone had anonymously faxed a copy of the ticket to The Californian on Monday.

Rubio chalked up his victory to dedicated volunteers who helped visit more than 15,000 homes.

"There was a committed group of volunteers that wouldn't say no," Rubio said. "We shaped the campaign around what people want and with that, you can't go wrong."

Watson easily wins race for supervisor

The Bakersfield Californian

March 3, 2004

JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writere-mail: jburger@bakersfield.com

Ray Watson easily won re-election to his 4th District seat on the Kern County Board of Supervisors Tuesday night. Watson had a commanding 79.5 percent of the votes with more than half of the precincts reporting.

Challenger Joel Moreno had only 20 percent of the vote.

But Moreno said he was happy his campaign was able to bring up environmental concerns and offer a voice to smaller county communities like Wasco, Lost Hills and Frazier Park.

"There is no loser in this race," he said.

[Watson said Moreno's issues are ones he's already been working on.](#)

[He said he will continue to work on air quality, dairies, transportation and economic development issues over the next four years.](#)

The pair focused on issues of growth and the environment. Moreno said the Board of Supervisors needs to take a more critical look at development.

Hopscotch development powered by the county's rapid growth rate could be "disastrous" if it isn't watched closely, he said.

Watson said he supports well-planned growth, developer's rights and the county's right to decide whether development plans are appropriate.

Watson, 67, is a retired television executive who was elected in 2002 to the seat vacated by late Supervisor Ken Peterson. Moreno, 49, is a training supervisor in the Kern County Department of Mental Health.

The race was Moreno's first bid for public office.

The two men live across the street from each other but never met until Moreno launched his campaign for Watson's seat.

The 4th District includes southwest Bakersfield, the Frazier Park area and much of western Kern, including Taft, Maricopa, Lost Hills and Wasco.