

Global warming vote sparks a heated debate

Fresno mayor won't sign on after council takes climate stand.

By George Hostetter

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, August 15, 2006

In the midst of one of the hottest local summers ever, Fresno also finds itself in the middle of the debate over global warming.

The City Council last month endorsed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, making Fresno the first central San Joaquin Valley city to embrace the brief document that already has the support of 275 American mayors.

There's one problem: Fresno Mayor Alan Autry has not signed on. And that leaves city officials struggling to figure out what the council's action means.

The nonbinding agreement challenges mayors to get their cities to voluntarily meet pollution-fighting goals based on the Kyoto Protocol, an international climate treaty negotiated in 1997 and signed by more than 140 countries. The Clinton administration signed the protocol, but the U.S. Senate has not ratified it.

President Bush has said the Kyoto Protocol would hurt the U.S. economy and doesn't hold developing nations to strict emission limits.

The climate protection agreement urges the U.S. to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, asks Congress to set clear timetables for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and encourages cities to fight global warming through such tactics as limiting sprawl and expanding public transit.

Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels is spearheading support for the agreement.

The mayors' initiative is part of a flurry of activity across the country by local and state governments, including California, to curb global warming in the absence of federal action. California lawmakers, for example, passed legislation requiring automakers to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 30% by 2016.

Autry, a Republican, says he is not bound by the council's action because it's not city policy. He says he neither signed nor vetoed the resolution because the agreement was born out of political opposition to President Bush at a U.S. Mayors Conference last year. Nickels is a Democrat.

"As a form of protest, I'm not going to sign off on [the council resolution], but I'm not going to veto it because there's a lot of good stuff in there," Autry says.

Council Member Brian Calhoun, who brought the issue to the council, says the agreement will inspire the city to do even more to reduce the pollution that causes global warming.

"I think we are well on our way to meeting those objectives," Calhoun says. "This kind of further holds our feet to the fire."

City Attorney James Sanchez says it's too early to predict the agreement's legal significance, saying the answer will have to be "fleshed out on a case by case basis."

But Council President Jerry Duncan, who voted no in the council's 5-1 decision July 18, says he fears environmental groups will use the resolution to launch "frivolous lawsuits" against the city. Council Member Henry T. Perea was out of town the day of the vote.

The agreement isn't legally binding, says John Healy, spokesman for Seattle's Office of Sustainability and the Environment.

"But I would say it is binding politically," he says. "People who attempt to use a document as greenwashing, who sign and say 'look how green I am' even though they don't do anything, are going to get their due in the court of public opinion."

Stockton Mayor Edward Chavez is among the mayors of 54 California cities who have endorsed the agreement, according to the Web site of Seattle Mayor Nickels.

Stockton spokeswoman Teri Bentz says Chavez endorsed "the concept of the agreement" at the 2005 U.S. Mayors Conference. However, Bentz says, neither Chavez nor the Stockton City Council has taken any action to implement the agreement.

Many experts say global warming is a reality. For example, a recent report from the California Climate Change Center and commissioned by the state found that "California's climate is expected to become considerably warmer during this century."

Temperatures could rise by as much as 10.5 degrees, air pollution could get worse, the Sierra Nevada snowpack could decline by 90% and rising sea levels could degrade estuaries, wetlands and ground-water aquifers, the report found.

The Fresno City Council's July 18 discussion on the agreement was relatively brief. No one from the public stepped forward to praise or criticize it.

Calhoun began by reading a statement noting that the city in late 2003 committed itself to reducing ozone and particulate emissions by 6% over three years.

Among the city's antipollution efforts were a multimillion-dollar solar power project at the City Yard, addition of electric- and natural gas-powered vehicles to the city fleet and new bicycle lanes throughout Fresno.

Some pollution-fighting projects were successful, while others fell short of their goals, Calhoun said. Endorsing the U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement will help take the city's efforts "to the next level."

Calhoun wants the City Council today to ask staff to develop an updated Team Clean Air plan that reduces the city's pollution by an additional 5% over the next three years.

Duncan challenged the rationale behind the agreement.

Calhoun's resolution, citing the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, states that "climate disruption is a reality and that human activities are largely responsible for increasing concentrations of global-warming pollution." Duncan said this is not proven.

Cleaning the air is a worthy goal that the city is already pursuing, Duncan said, but Calhoun's resolution and the agreement will give a tool to people who want to halt "progress" in Fresno.

Duncan said the resolution "gets us involved in a debate that I don't think the City Council of Fresno needs to be involved in."

Residents air pesticide complaints at workshop

By Jim Guy

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, August 15, 2006

The problem of pesticides' role in air pollution may be scientifically complex, but that doesn't mean it doesn't hit home emotionally for Central Valley residents, if a Monday night forum on the issue is a good measure.

Representatives of the state Department of Pesticide Regulation heard from farmworkers complaining of chronic pain from agricultural overspray, those who blame pesticide companies for the problem and a grower who defended his industry at a Pesticide Air Initiative Workshop in Parlier.

The purpose was to get public comment about the department's strategy to cut the part pesticides, particularly fumigants, play in producing the Valley's serious air pollution problem.

By the department's estimate, pesticides are the source of 6.3% of the volatile organic compounds that dirty Valley air.

The department has pledged to have a plan in place to reduce smog-producing chemicals from pesticide emissions to reach air-quality goals by 2008. Getting there involves an ambitious effort

that will require reformulation of present chemicals, changing the way pesticides are applied and development of new technologies.

Some at the session accused the department of not moving fast enough to clear the air.

Brent Newell, a staff attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, said the department has been dragging its feet. He said the original state plan was to cut 20% of farm-produced smog by 1994 and that it took a ruling by a judge this year to hold the department's feet to the fire.

Paul H. Gosselin, chief deputy director for the department, disagreed. "They can say that," he said, "but I think we put together a bold plan."

A solution won't come soon enough for Teresa Vina of Huron, who said pesticides are too much a part of her life in her home near the fields. She said early-morning spraying is a special difficulty.

"In the early morning, we all wake up feeling sick," she said.

Don't blame the grower, countered Wayne Western, who grows 2,400 acres of tomatoes near Firebaugh. He also questioned the department's estimate that one pound of fumigant into the ground ends up in Valley air. "As growers, we take every precaution to see that the pesticide goes where it's supposed to go," he said.

Lawmakers to expand farm labor vanpool program

Vehicles used to safely transport farmworkers

By Gina Faridniya , Sacramento Bureau

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2006

SACRAMENTO - A Central Valley vanpool program is on the verge of a statewide \$20 million expansion that will help more farmworkers travel safely to their jobs.

The expansion will build on a vanpool program that began in 2002 and has served counties in the San Joaquin Valley, including Tulare.

Since the tragic van crash at Five Points in Fresno County in 1999, Senator Dean Florez, D-Shafter, has enacted legislation requiring manufacturer-installed seats and seat belts in farm labor vehicles. The number of crash fatalities radically decreased, inspiring U.S. Senators Diane Feinstein, D-California, and Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, to introduce similar nationwide legislation.

In April of 2002, the Kings County Area Public Transit Agency received \$5.8 million in state and federal funds and launched the Agricultural Industries Transportation Services program. With this funding, AITS acquired 123 new 15-passenger vans and began what will become a model for future van-pool services.

AITS vans are insured and include proper seat belts, seats, and responsible drivers. In Tulare County, AITS safely transports hundreds of workers.

Farmworkers with a valid class "C" driver's license and a clean driving record are eligible to become AITS drivers. To begin a vanpool, the driver must organize at least eight workers in order for AITS to cover the operational costs of the van.

Sprawl will go on ballot in 2008

Initiative calls for public approval before farmland is rezoned to residential

By Tim Moran, Bee Staff Writer

Modesto Bee, Wed. Aug. 16, 2006

The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to put an anti-sprawl initiative on the ballot - nearly two years later than proponents had hoped.

The Stamp Out Sprawl initiative, called "The 30-Year Land Use Restriction Initiative" by the county, would prohibit rezoning agricultural land to residential in unincorporated areas without a

public vote. Organizers submitted more than 16,000 signatures on June 26 to put the issue on the November ballot.

The Board of Supervisors, however, ordered a report to be prepared before voting on it, which delayed action beyond the Aug. 11 deadline for making the November ballot. June 2008 is the next statewide election - one that would include the whole county - in which the measure would be eligible. All five county supervisors oppose the initiative, and the report aired Tuesday criticized it on a variety of issues.

The initiative raises legal, financial, land-use and infrastructure funding problems, said county Chief Executive Officer Rick Robinson.

Among the problems he discussed were obstacles to affordable housing, county liability for declining property values, lost revenue to fund roads and sewers for commercial and industrial development, and the potential to pit bigger cities against smaller, unincorporated towns.

Modesto City Councilman Garrad Marsh and former Modesto Councilman Denny Jackman, organizers of the initiative effort, took issue with the report.

"The entire premise is based on one of two options," Marsh told the supervisors. "Either your projects are so bad that you don't think the public will approve them, or you don't have faith in the voters to approve quality development."

The initiative just asks that the public be allowed to choose what it wants developed, Marsh said.

Jackman went through several items in the report in an attempt to rebut the criticism. The initiative doesn't prohibit anything, he said, it just sends rezonings to the public for a vote. The supervisors had only two choices under state law: adopting the ordinance immediately or putting it on the ballot.

"I would not favor adopting this," Supervisor Jim DeMartini said. "I don't believe it preserves farmland."

The soon-to-be-completed agriculture element to the county's general plan will be more effective at preserving farmland, he said.

Supervisor Jeff Grover commented that studies have shown that farmland in Stanislaus County has increased in recent years, and population growth in the unincorporated areas shrank slightly in 2005.

"I've worked hard to stop sprawl, and I will continue to do that," he said.

Preserving agriculture entails more than saving land and the right to farm, Grover said - it involves making sure farms stay profitable as expenses rise and food prices are stagnant. Recent meetings between city and county officials on creating a countywide "blueprint" for land use may make the initiative unnecessary by 2008, Grover added.

Distribution is big business

By John Saiz

Patterson Irrigator, Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2006

New industry has taken root in Patterson, with the recently built Kohl's and Longs Drugs Stores distribution centers opening for business.

The centers, part of Keystone Pacific Business Park in western Patterson, have been open for about two months and have assumed the mantle of two of Patterson's largest employers.

The Longs distribution center ships products to retail outlets as far as Nevada, Washington and areas around Fresno.

Kohl's officials did not respond to repeated phone calls and e-mails. However, a prepared statement by the company says its distribution center, which opened in June, supports 110 stores.

"The complexity is not in the movement of a single item, but in moving thousands," said Stephen McCormick, facility manager for the Longs distribution center. "And that's even understating it."

The highly mechanized Longs center employs about 470 people, McCormick said. The 800,000-square-foot building houses about 15,000 products and operates close to 24 hours a day.

The center could have as many as 600 employees in a few years and store around 27,000 types of items, McCormick said. That would make it Patterson's second-largest employer, according to the Alliance, a Modesto-based agency that oversees economic development in Stanislaus County.

Patterson Frozen Foods is still the city's largest employer, peaking at 750 employees during certain seasons.

Construction on the Longs center started in October. Now, about 35 trucks come and go from there each day.

Starting wages are around \$12.50 an hour, and employees receive health and dental benefits. Longs is still accepting applications.

"We're pretty close to fully operational," McCormick said.

Most workers at the center came from a Lathrop distribution center, built in the late 1990s, that is being phased out. The Lathrop center is dwarfed by the new facility, which is almost twice its size.

"Finding everything, Bob?" McCormick asked one employee, as he walked through row upon row of assorted products.

"Finding some of it," the man answered, as he drove by in a small cart.

Longs now distributes about 57 percent of its non-pharmacy merchandise to its stores in the continental U.S., compared to about 40 percent of that merchandise when construction began on the Patterson facility.

The company is moving toward self-distributing 80 percent of its front-end merchandise by the end of 2007, said Warren F. Bryant, president and CEO of Longs Drugs Stores.

However, even at that point, certain manufacturers that sell their items through Longs will choose to distribute their own products to individual stores, Longs spokeswoman Farra Levin explained.

Many employees commute from Stockton to get to the center and have a longer drive now because of the move. Whether all of them will continue to make the commute is uncertain.

"People are just testing the water right now," McCormick said.

[To help get people used to the extra distance, Longs has started a ride-share program to encourage carpooling.](#)

Upgrades in the new facility include a cardboard bundler that compresses massive amounts of cardboard into hulking bundles, which are then sold for recycling.

Though the center is in full swing, a few finishing touches are still under way, such as landscaping and some painting.

Nano firm reduces diesel fumes, improves mileage

Michael Kanellos, for News.com

In the N.Y. Times, Wednesday, August 16, 2006

The smell of diesel fumes is pervasive in the developing world, but a fuel additive from the United Kingdom may take the edge off the aroma.

Petrol Ofisi, one of the leading oil companies in Turkey, has said it will include in its diesel fuel an additive from British nanotechnology specialist Oxonica that helps increase gas mileage by 5 percent to 10 percent and cut down nitrogen-based emissions. The change to fuel consumption also helps reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

A tour bus company in Britain and another group in the Philippines already incorporate Oxonica's Envirox fuel additive into its diesel fuel. The additive, based on cerium oxide (a powder often used for polishing glass lenses), makes the combustion process more efficient.

The deal will generate revenue of around \$12.7 million for Oxonica this year, according to the company.

Like Nanosys, the Palo Alto, Calif.-based company that develops inorganic nanostructures for use in a variety of applications, Oxonica produces molecules for several different markets rather than concentrating on one field. The company also works with the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory on sensors to detect airborne pathogens like anthrax. It also makes products for the health care market.

Although ethanol is often touted as the car fuel of the future, a significant amount of research is being conducted on making sure that traditional fossil fuels burn cleaner. Fossil fuels, after all, will be around for a while. At the moment, the world consumes about 80 million barrels of oil a day, a rate that will rise to around 121 million barrels a day by 2030, according to the International Energy Agency. The growth largely comes from transportation fuel.

Shell and Exxon are setting up factories in Qatar for converting natural gas to fuel. This fuel costs more than regular gasoline, but it produces fewer pollutants. Air pollution has become so bad in some areas that local governments have begun to regulate traffic. New Delhi, for instance, has banned diesel buses from certain areas.

Record Heat Scorches Valley; Residents, Livestock, Crops Suffer

Valley Voice, August 16, 2006

Tulare County - The record-breaking heat wave that scorched the Central Valley through much of July came to a merciful end last week, but not before killing as many as 150 people across the state as well as tens of thousands of animals, and pushing the state's electricity supply to the brink.

Residents of the Central Valley, where triple-digit temps ruled for 14 straight days, took the brunt of the punishing heat and uncharacteristic humidity.

"This is like nothing we've ever seen before," said Visalia Mayor Jesus Gamboa last week. The heat wave was unprecedented in the past 57 years, state officials said.

Making matters worse, unusually high night time lows, which kept the mercury above 80 degrees, provided little relief to the blistering day time heat and wreaked havoc on area farms, orchards and dairy operations.

Cases of heat-related illnesses flooded Valley hospitals. The elderly and those with respiratory conditions suffered the most.

"Bad air conditions together with the excessive heat are causing those with asthma and other serious respiratory or health issues more problems than usual," said Kaweah Delta Health Care District's Angela Bouma. "Because of the influx of patients in Valley emergency departments, officials are encouraging people with minor injuries to visit their local physician or walk-in clinic rather than coming to the emergency room."

In Fresno County, the coroner's office reportedly ran out of room and had to stack deceased heat victims like cord wood until they could be identified by next of kin.

You wouldn't think of the entrance to Sequoia Park at Ash Mountain Visitor Center above Three Rivers as the county's hot spot but during the hottest four days in late July, July 23-26, Ash Mountain weather station recorded a record 114 degrees Fahrenheit on the 26th although parks spokesperson Alex Picavet says the thermometer broke at 113 for two days prior. "We had to buy a new one."

This is the second time in a decade that the temperature reached this record level. Three Rivers recorded 20 days above 100 degrees in July according to The Weather Channel.

The warm weather was punctuated by thunderstorms that flooded the East Fork of the Kaweah River turning the water a muddy brown. "When it rained during the heat it was just awful," says Picavet.

According to the Pumpkin Hollow weather station in Three Rivers, Kaweah River water temps reached 73 degrees although the depth of where the measurement was taken is not clear. That's warm water for the Kaweah River suggest some.

The unrelenting heat also killed hundreds of cows and tens of thousands of chickens and turkeys and threatened to cripple Valley ag output.

The California Farm Bureau reported that since the beginning of the heat wave, milk production was down significantly.

Dairy industry representatives estimated last week the damage could reach \$1 billion for the two week hot spell counting lost milk production. As many as 16,000 cows may have perished by one estimate. UC Tulare veterinarian Jim Cullor says he thinks the number here was more like 1 in 1000 and with about a million animals in Tulare county that means the loss here could have been as many as 1000 cattle. "Depending on management, some operators can keep their losses low like 1 to 2 percent a year, but others suffer losses of 6 percent a year," he says. "Just like people, cows need lots of water to cool them down."

Losses in the poultry industry were high at about 700,000 chickens and 160,000 turkeys valley wide, estimates Bill Mattos of the California Poultry Federation.

In addition, the heat shriveled the ripening grape crops report industry sources, wilted processing tomatoes, sunburned the walnut crop and may have impacted stored fruit that wasn't cooled.

Beef producers reduced the caloric load in their feed in the hopes of slowing down their animals' metabolism and weight loss.

One prominent beef producer said the heat was killing animals at "an alarming rate" and would surely lower the company's bottom line. Dairymen predicted the unprecedented heat wave would translate into higher prices for milk in coming months.

County livestock operations were given emergency permission to bury dead animals on site after one area rendering facility unexpectedly closed and other facilities overloaded.

On the eighth day of intense heat wave, electricity usage peaked at 50,270 megawatts an all-time record for California.

"It appears we have ridden out this mammoth peak demand without any problems," said Stephanie McCorkle of the California Independent System Operator (ISO), which manages the state's power grid. "This was the most strained the system has ever been."

Hoping to avoid involuntary rolling blackouts in California, Cal ISO declared a "Stage 2" emergency, which called for businesses to reduce their power usage in exchange for lower rates.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger directed state agencies to reduce electricity use by 25 percent and urged local and municipal governments and universities to do the same.

The reductions appeared to work and Cal ISO officials backed off their threat of having to institute rolling blackouts.

One of the few good things to come out of the heat wave: Ag officials in Fresno County lifted a three-month fruit fly quarantine because the searing heat worked to speed up the pest's life cycle.

Meteorologist John Hibler said late last week: "It was the duration, the day after day after day high heat that was unprecedented."

The hottest temperature registered around the Valley, according to Hibler, was 116 degrees in Delano on July 25.

"This is rare and not a typical summer weather pattern," Hibler explained. "The bottom line is that we were directly under the circulation of an unusually strong, upper-level high pressure system. But on average, the second and third weeks of July are typically the hottest two weeks in the Northern Hemisphere."

Some blamed the blistering heat wave on global warming but scientists said there was still no definitive evidence linking the latest record-setting temps to Al Gore's favorite subject. Rather, climatologist Daniel R. Cayan of Scripps and the U.S. Geological Survey attributed the higher than normal temps to "largely natural variability."

Tulare County Ag Commissioner Gary Kunkel said it would be weeks, perhaps months, before all of the ag-related damage is known.

"It's too early for numbers but we're likely to see damage to the nut crops, particularly the walnut crop," said Kunkel late last week. "I've heard that production in cows that are still producing milk is down some 30 percent. The other thing we're likely to see is sunburning and defects in things like table grapes and tree fruit, peaches, plums and nectarines. We'll be busy trying to assess the damage over the next few weeks."

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Wednesday, August 16, 2006:](#)

Yes, it is California's issue

IF GLOBAL WARMING is a genuine threat -- as a growing body of scientific evidence strongly suggests -- our need to act goes beyond our moral obligation to future generations. It's in our economic interest to move assertively and definitively toward reducing greenhouse gases.

By now, it's obvious that U.S. leadership on global warming is not going to come from the Bush administration.

In recent years, the evidence that the planet is not only warming -- but that its effects are coming quicker than anticipated, as seen from the melting of polar ice caps to the ferocity of tropical storms -- has created a sense of urgency in the scientific community. The evidence is equally compelling that human activity, mainly the burning of fossil fuels, is driving the problem.

Waiting is not an option, especially in a coastal state such as ours that relies on a Sierra snowpack for its water supply and levees to protect its cities and sustain its farmland.

The question is, who will lead?

"The debate is over," Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said in June. "We know the science. We see the threat."

Schwarzenegger and the California Legislature are considering a bill that would push the state to the forefront of the fight against global warming. On Thursday, Assembly Bill 32, authored by Speaker Fabian Núñez, is expected to emerge from its holding pattern in the Senate Appropriations Committee to become the most consequential and contentious issue in the closing weeks of the legislative session.

In essence, AB32 would require Californians and their businesses to do what other industrialized countries have agreed to do, with the notable exception of the United States and Australia -- namely, to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions to 1990-levels by 2020.

If passed, this measure would not only force the state to quickly develop less polluting technologies -- for everything from household appliances to energy-intensive cement production - - it would compel us to change the way we think about our land-use planning and our transportation systems.

Schwarzenegger supports the concept of the Núñez bill, and their staffs have been working to reconcile differences.

They agree on one critical bottom line: The emission-reduction targets (based on the Kyoto Protocol that the United States has refused to sign) are achievable and a commitment to meet

them is vital to this state's environmental health -- while presenting a golden opportunity for its economy.

Their differences, while not insignificant, will not stop the bill if both sides are willing to listen to the other's legitimate points. The upshot of their disputes is this: Núñez, siding with environmentalist supporters of the bill, wants to make certain the emissions targets are binding and enforced. One of their arguments is that investment in emission-reduction technologies -- the key to buffering the economic effects of weaning the state off fossil fuels -- will come only if entrepreneurs are convinced the rules will be steadfast.

Schwarzenegger's office has been arguing for slightly more flexibility to defer the mandates in the event of natural disaster or other unforeseen emergency. The governor also wants to set up a trading system so that California companies have an economic incentive to exceed their emissions-reductions quotas. The two sides also disagree on whether the policing of the global-warming plan should be handled by the California Air Resources Board (Núñez's preference) or a board composed of the heads of state agencies (Schwarzenegger's option).

Even though the governor and speaker are not that far apart on the key points, and AB32 earlier cleared the Assembly on a 50-27 vote, its fate is anything but certain. The California Chamber of Commerce, a powerful business lobby that had been in sync with Schwarzenegger through most of his term, is making an all-out blitz to defeat what it calls a "job killer" bill that will put state industries at a daunting disadvantage against states and countries without such rules. It warns that energy prices are likely to rise if AB32 is adopted. The chamber prefers a voluntary approach based on tax credits and other incentives.

Proponents of AB32 make a persuasive argument that there is an economic advantage to being ahead of the curve in stimulating technologies that will only increase in demand in the decades ahead. The potential economic stresses of the transition -- while admittedly difficult on certain industries -- pale in comparison to the wholesale devastation to our planet and our way of life if the nation with the world's largest economy and No. 1 contributor of greenhouse gases continues to sit on the sidelines.

California must lead the way with the passage of AB32.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Wednesday, Aug. 16 2006:](#)

Kern's future depends on winning sludge battle

Kern County voters are looking at the business end of Southern California's big gun.

The City of Los Angeles has joined with other Southern California counties and agencies to file a federal lawsuit to block the ban voters approved in June on hauling sludge to Kern County, where it is smeared on farm land.

They have brought in the fire power of national law firms that have represented sludge applicators and disposal companies in legal battles over similar bans in other states.

They have declared war, bringing an army to fight what they hope will be a lone, underfunded rural county.

The stakes are extremely high for those of us who depend on [clean air to breathe](#), unpolluted water to drink and untainted crops to eat.

Kern County must be joined in this battle by interests that have much to lose if this putrid waste continues to flow north. These include:

- The water agencies that contend applying Southern California sludge to the land will pollute our drinking and irrigation water.
- Growers and food processing companies that fear crops grown on sludge-laced fields will harm those who eat them.

- Other industries that watch the air quality be degraded by the dust and fumes emitted by Southern California's waste, restricting Kern's ability to expand and attract new industries.

Southern California believes it's better to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to fight Kern County's ban in court than improve treatment of its industrial and human waste, or find alternative disposal methods.

Why?

Because its cheaper to haul it to Kern County just toss it over the Tehachapi Mountains. Out of sight, out of mind. It's someone else's problem.

Sludge is what's scraped from the bottom of sewer plants. It is human and chemical waste. Land owners and disposal companies pawn off this toxic stew as "fertilizer" that will enhance the land.

What a joke! Vegetable growers and water officials aren't laughing. They know better.

Southern California used to pipe its sludge into the ocean. Again out of sight. But this waste was declared a threat to the fish and other ocean creatures. Los Angeles and coastal communities were ordered to stop.

Accidental spills, illegal dumping and runoffs from the land continue to flow into the ocean, endangering California's coastline. Last month, *The Los Angeles Times* published an extensive series of stories spelling out the dangers.

Odd. The stuff that is bad for the fish and bad for the surfers is oh, so yummy good for the country bumpkins in Kern County who are supposed to sit back quietly and take it.

If it's so harmless and so helpful, Los Angeles and other Southern California communities should apply it to the land in the areas that are generating the waste.

That's just it. Those who are creating this goo would pitch a fit if it was spread near them.

They would pitch an even bigger fit if their sewer rates went up to better treat the waste.

Waste-to-energy technology is being developed. Methods to convert sludge to less harmful materials exist.

But those disposal strategies cost money. Why bother when you can bully Kern County into swallowing the crap you dole out?

The lawsuit filed Tuesday was not unexpected. It's just disappointing.

The quality of our life and the future of our community depend on Kern County winning the war Southern California has declared.

[USA Today commentary, Wednesday, August 16, 2006:](#)

US could learn a thing or two from Singapore

By Alan M. Webber

Ah, Summer 2006! Time to pack up the car, put the kids in the back seat and drive off. But wait! The president says the nation is dangerously addicted to oil. Al Gore wants you to take personal responsibility for his "inconvenient truth." You know, how burning fossil fuels is causing global warming. And then there's the harsh reality of the gas pump: Every time you fill up the car you have to empty your wallet.

America's transportation policy today - and especially the overarching role played by the automobile - makes you think of that policy guru of long ago, the late Casey Stengel, who once asked, "Can't anybody here play this game?"

The answer is, yes - just nobody in America. Take a look, instead, at Singapore. That's right, Singapore. I know: When most Americans think of Singapore, all they can conjure up are prohibitions against spitting and chewing gum, and a decades-old news item about an American teenager being caned for being a graffiti artist.

Well, times have changed. It's time to take another look, and in particular, a look at how Singapore's transportation policymakers deal with the tyranny of the automobile.

Start with Singapore's general approach to every policy issue. The overarching premise is that the government intends to run the country with a business-driven perspective. That's an idea you'd think would appeal to President Bush, America's first MBA chief executive.

Our competitive streak

Singapore's second big motivation is to compare with Hong Kong, its regional rival. When Singaporeans talk about Hong Kong, they're always happy to point out their rival's terrible traffic congestion and the smog and pollution that make the air hard to breathe and easy to see. Given America's natural instinct for competition, that's another area where you'd think we could take a page from Singapore's book.

So what is it that the Singaporean government has crafted as its comprehensive policy approach to the auto? The first thing you need to know is, if you want to buy a car in Singapore, you first must buy a permit to buy a car. Every year since 1990, Singapore has set an annual quota using Certificates of Entitlement to cap vehicle growth in different categories. Then every two weeks, the COEs are auctioned off over the Web. The current price is roughly \$10,000 for a midsize car. And here's the policy kicker: The money goes into supporting an efficient, highly developed mass transit system, which today handles about 4 million rides per day, compared with 3 million daily private auto trips.

Taxes are the other energy-conserving measure adopted by the Singaporean government. In particular, car buyers pay an annual tax that specifically punishes high-powered, gas-guzzling engines. But for every stick there's a carrot: The government awards a lump sum tax rebate of 40% of the price of a vehicle to Singaporeans who opt for hybrids. As any public policy wonk will tell you, tax policy is public policy. In the case of Singapore, the policy message is clear: Gasoline is scarce and expensive - and likely only to become more so. Tax policies that encourage conservation and punish waste just make sense.

As does the Singaporean approach to fighting traffic and congestion. Since 1998, Singapore has boasted a completely electronic road pricing system. Here's how it works. During certain hours of the day, drivers are charged a premium for using certain roads around the central business district - electronically. An electronic eye mounted over the road beams down to a dashboard-mounted unit on each car. A cash card placed in the unit is automatically charged for using the premium lane. If you want to make good time during rush hour, say, you pay the price for using the premium lane. If money is more important than time, you avoid the lane and take an alternate route.

These are just a few of the thoughtfully aligned policy incentives adopted in Singapore. More important, perhaps, Singapore is only one of many places in the world that is making energy conservation and auto management a priority. Just as globalization has made American companies learn from other businesses around the world, so the opportunity exists for mayors, governors and even members of Congress and White House officials to learn from more advanced, more adventurous nations.

Can it happen here?

I know what you're thinking: Won't happen. Americans are too wedded to current transportation policies to alter their habits. Political leaders lack the courage, will or foresight to try approaches borrowed from faraway places such as Singapore, where the government is accustomed to wielding a heavier hand.

Maybe. But some of us are old enough to remember the energy crises of the 1970s. Back then, embargoes by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries put the USA to the test. In some states, Americans were forced to adopt an even-odd system, alternating days on which they could purchase fuel. Lines at gas pumps led to creatively improvised solutions. Some mayors even compelled downtown office building owners to make their high-rises go dark to save on energy.

The fact is, we've already seen Singaporean policies happen in this country. And given the events in the Middle East and the growing thirst for oil in China, we'll probably see them again. The only question is whether we'll choose to implement new transportation and energy policies, or whether we'll wait until we're forced to do it.

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