

Maverick senator eyes governorship

By VIC POLLARD

Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, July 15 2007

SACRAMENTO - State Sen. Dean Florez is a rare politician, one who often says what he's really thinking.

"Cowards is the word that comes to mind," he told reporters recently after an Assembly committee trashed his controversial food safety bills without taking votes that would have put its members on record.

"I'm pissed," he said in an angry e-mail to The Californian when the San Joaquin Valley's air board voted to poke loopholes in laws he sponsored to halt open-air burning of agricultural waste.

Florez's penchant for speaking his mind is just one of the things that makes him stand out as one of the most unusual, complicated members of the California Legislature.

Supporters and critics alike - and he has many of both - agree he operates with the guts of a riverboat gambler who plays his cards very close to his vest.

Those are traits that may serve him well as he prepares to run for statewide office in 2010. He makes no secret of the fact that his long-term goal is to become the first Hispanic governor of California in modern times, if Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa doesn't beat him to it.

In nine years representing the west side of the San Joaquin Valley in the Assembly and the Senate, the Democratic lawmaker from Shafter has defied the historical stereotype of valley politicians.

A maverick and a loner

Traditionally, whether they're Republicans or Democrats, they've followed one formula for success. They act as loyal servants of the region's biggest industry, agriculture. They also cultivate alliances with party leaders and governors to help overcome the weak hand they play against more powerful urban delegations.

Not Florez.

He has charted his own course as a maverick and a loner who increasingly carries a heavy load of legislation to benefit workers, consumers and the environment, often requiring the agriculture industry to submit to new regulations on air pollution, food contamination, pesticide safety and other issues.

And he's done it with a swashbuckling style that often drives his opponents - and fellow lawmakers - to distraction. He's famous for holding frequent news conferences and legislative hearings to call attention to his current issue with a flair that gets his name in print and his face on TV in the valley with the frequency of a Hollywood celebrity.

"I think he is the ideal legislator," said Kevin Hall, a Fresno environmental activist who helped Florez pass legislation in 2003 that required California dairies and farms to comply with clean-air rules for the first time in history.

"He's one of the best I've ever seen," said Frank Pecard. Pecard is a Bakersfield native and a retired federal government worker who spends much of his time as a politically savvy gadfly on the Internet, criticizing most other government officials with venom but drumming up support for Florez's current legislation to prevent E. coli disease outbreaks from contaminated vegetables.

Making enemies

Sharply different views come from farmers and Florez's rivals in the contentious arena of Kern County politics.

Kern County farmers who were contacted would not comment about Florez on the record, but Tim Chelling, spokesman for the Western Growers Association that many of them belong to, said Florez's latest legislative crusade to impose tough new food safety rules on vegetable growers to halt E. coli outbreaks amounts to massive overkill.

"We differ (with Florez) when it comes to substance versus theater," Chelling said. "Theater may be entertaining. It may even be dramatic. But when it has no effect, it's simply irrelevant."

Fellow valley lawmakers no longer try to hide their resentment of Florez's one-man legislative crusades.

"Among the San Joaquin Valley representatives," said Republican Sen. Roy Ashburn of Bakersfield, "I think we do make an effort to kind of communicate with one another on what we're doing, recognizing that there are going to be differences of opinion. Dean doesn't really engage in that."

Florez has also been a pain to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, criticizing him for refusing to support his food safety bills and not doing enough to help victims of last summer's deadly heat wave and this winter's freeze.

A hard worker

Asked to comment, Adam Mendelsohn, Schwarzenegger's communications chief, responded diplomatically, "There are times that we agree with Sen. Florez's tactics and times that we disagree with Sen. Florez's tactics," he said, "but no one can argue with the fact that he has aggressive tactics."

Florez, who was called into the governor's office for a tense confrontation over the food safety issue earlier this year, acknowledged that his relations with the governor have soured.

"The governor and I used to lift weights together," he said ruefully. "Now, I'm not sure I'd want him to spot me."

For a politician who has coasted through three easy elections, Florez carries a staggering load of legislation, much of it freighted with controversy such as the clean air and food safety bills.

But he is even better known in Kern County for his unconventional practice of tackling problems that often involve prodding local or state officials into action instead of introducing a bill. These have been as small as crossing arms at a dangerous railroad crossing and as big as the hundreds of thousands of tons of sewage sludge from Southern California dumped on Kern County farmland.

Many of his crusades are prompted by news stories or newspaper investigations, leading some critics to view him as the legislative equivalent of an ambulance-chasing lawyer.

But that's not what Florez is about, said Kern County Supervisor Michael Rubio. He is a former aide to Florez who is viewed as part of a budding Kern County political empire that may eventually include Florez's mother, Fran, and other family members and close associates.

"He's not one to let anything go by," Rubio said.

Why does he take on so many issues?

"Work is more fun than fun," Florez said in an interview. "I can't imagine sitting still."

Besides, he said, he wants to do as much as he can to help people like consumers threatened with contaminated vegetables, kids suffering from asthma and farmworkers suffering from heat and pesticide exposure.

Florez also plays hard, as do most members of his family. Their recreation usually involves competition and striving to be No. 1. He is an inveterate runner, pushing himself so hard that a couple of years ago he suffered a stress fracture of his pelvic bone in a race in Bakersfield. The family currently spends its weekends at swim meets for his 7-year-old daughter, Faith, a Junior Olympics hopeful. He's also an assistant football coach at his alma mater, Shafter High.

Burning bridges

In Sacramento, his legislative success is especially remarkable because he has so few allies, or even close friends, in the Legislature, where he needs 20 votes in the Senate besides his own and 41 in the Assembly to pass most of his bills.

Florez alienated many fellow Democrats in his first couple of years in the Assembly when he refused to vote for gun control and gay rights legislation that were poison to his conservative valley constituency.

But he burned nearly all his remaining party bridges in 2002 when he conducted weeks of investigative hearings into an embarrassing \$95 million no-bid software contract signed with Oracle Corp. by the administration of then-Gov. Gray Davis.

By then, Florez had already begun to strain his relations with the valley's powerful agriculture industry by aligning himself with the United Farm Workers union in support of a farmworker health insurance bill. Florez had earlier angered the UFW by voting against a statewide holiday for Cesar Chavez in 2000, publicly speaking against it as not doing anything substantive for farmworkers.

In 2003, his first year in the Senate, he burned the agriculture bridge completely by introducing the landmark bills to end the industry's exemption from clean-air laws and getting them passed and signed into law. The current food safety bills aren't likely to help rebuild those bridges.

An important ally

So how does he keep getting major, controversial legislation passed?

Because he has one friend and ally who is more equal than all the others in the Senate, President pro tem Don Perata, D-Oakland. And that is remarkable because Florez supported Perata's opponent for the Senate's top leadership post.

Much of Florez's influence flows from his appointment by Perata to head the Senate Governmental Organization Committee, which handles politically sensitive issues of Indian casino compacts and other gambling issues. Tribal casinos bring in several hundred million dollars a year in state revenues and they are generous campaign contributors.

The Governmental Organization Committee can also conduct investigative or oversight hearings on a number of other organizations, such as the California Lottery, a favorite target of Florez.

Florez has not made any waves on the committee, and perhaps in return, Perata gives him a long leash to push his own crusades.

"It's based primarily," Ashburn said, "on (Florez's) loyalty in carrying out the pro tem's wishes."

Perata did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

Although he began his career as a business-friendly moderate with the usual allegiance to valley agriculture, Florez's recent emphasis on consumer, environmental and farmworker safety issues marks a dramatic turn to the left.

Florez-watchers conclude it's a move that is probably necessary for the all-but-impossible task of a politician from the conservative Central Valley to win a Democratic primary election for lieutenant governor, his current target, in a state dominated by liberal Democratic voters in the coastal big cities where Florez is not well known.

Florez says they're right.

"Those are the kinds of credentials I would say people would look for," he said. "'What did you do in your district?' coming from a district that's pretty conservative, is the No. 1 question people will ask, and I think we've pretty much stretched the limits."

But others say there are huge risks in abandoning the constituency, or political base, that put one in office and trying to create a new one somewhere else.

"He's got to have his base," said Ken Khachigian, a Visalia native and a Republican who has become one of the top political advisers in the nation. "And right now, he spends a good deal of time running to the left of his base."

The new Hispanic generation

But Florez said he doesn't think the predominantly Republican agriculture industry is as important to a valley political career as it once was.

"We've evolved as the valley has changed and become more urban," he said, characteristically referring to himself in the first person plural. Florez, who was born in Shafter and was a local high school football star until he was sidelined by a broken leg, sees himself as part of the new generation of Hispanics with college educations and responsibilities to accomplish big things.

"My grandparents worked in the fields," he said. "My parents escaped the fields and worked 9 to 5, my mother in a bank and my father with a manufacturing company. I'm the third generation. I've got work just as hard."

Will that get him elected governor?

Not without one other key ingredient, said Khachigian:

"He'd better be prepared to raise about \$15 million."

Profile:

Dean Florez

Age: 44

Home: Shafter

Education: BS, political science, UCLA; MBA, Harvard Business School.

Family: Wife, Elsa and two children, Faith, 7, Sean 17.

Current office: State Senator, 16th District; Elected in 2002 and re-elected in 2006

Term limit: 2010

Previous positions: Chief of staff to former Sen. Art Torres, D-Los Angeles; investment banker. Assemblyman, 30th District; elected 1998, re-elected 2000.

Legislators to put off break

BY STEVE LAWRENCE, Associated Press

LA Daily News and Sacramento Bee, July 15, 2007

SACRAMENTO - California legislators are scheduled to begin a monthlong summer vacation on Friday, but they're not packing their bags. There's a little problem called the state budget to deal with first.

California began a new fiscal year on July 1, and for the 21st time since 1977 that year started without a budget.

Democratic leaders say they'll schedule votes on their budget proposal this week, but there's no indication it will get the two-thirds majorities required in both houses to send it to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's desk.

"I've already canceled my vacation plans," Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, said. "If I'm here every day until a budget is done, every member of the California Assembly will be here Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday Friday, Saturday and Sunday until we deliver a budget."

California is among a handful of states that require a super majority to pass a budget. In California, this essentially gives Republicans a veto over anything the Democratic majority proposes. That frequently has caused stalemates. The state has lacked full spending authority for as long as two months.

It was July 31 when Schwarzenegger signed a budget in 2004. Former Democratic Gov. Gray Davis didn't sign a budget into law until Sept. 5 in 2002.

A two-house budget committee approved a \$140 billion state spending plan last month that would use billions of dollars from previous years' tax windfalls to help cover expenses.

Democrats say their budget bill has a bigger reserve and would leave a smaller ongoing deficit than the budget plan Schwarzenegger disclosed in May.

But Republican lawmakers want an additional \$2 billion in cuts.

"We have to rein this in because we literally don't have the money," said Assembly Minority Leader Mike Villines, R-Fresno. "We have about \$2 billion in spending that we don't have. That will increase next year's problems, and we don't have the money next year."

He said Republicans had suggested two or three different ways to make the cuts while still respecting Democratic priorities.

"What I think is happening is they just don't want to hear it," he said.

Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, said constitutional restrictions and federal law leave budget writers few areas to cut.

Republican legislators "don't want to cut anything to do with certain areas," he said. "They want us to cut in places where Democrats just didn't get elected to come up here and cut: any program that involves the elderly, people who are disabled, people who are mentally ill.

"Our mantra is kind of, 'We are here to protect those who cannot protect themselves.'"

He suggested the budget debate really should be between Schwarzenegger and Republican lawmakers, not Democrats and Republicans.

"The governor is a Republican," Perata said. "He had one thing in mind, and the other Republicans have another thing in mind. We've got to sit down and work it out."

Schwarzenegger was in Florida on Friday for a conference on global warming and a Republican campaign fundraising event. He's scheduled to spend three days this week in different regions of California as part of a renewed pitch for new dams and other water projects that Democrats have long opposed.

But H.D. Palmer, a spokesman for the governor's Department of Finance, said Schwarzenegger isn't neglecting efforts to reach a budget agreement.

"He will continue to have dialogue with both Republican and Democratic leaders to try to move this process forward to get a responsible budget to his desk in a form he can sign," Palmer said.

Budget writers got some more potentially bad news before the weekend. The Department of Finance said June revenue was \$306 million below forecasts, meaning total revenue so far for the 2006-07 fiscal year is \$829 million below department predictions.

Also this week:

The Senate Rules Committee will hold a hearing Tuesday to consider Schwarzenegger's appointment of Mary Nichols to head the Air Resources Board. The Republican governor nominated Nichols to replace Robert Sawyer, an air-quality science professor at the University of California at Berkeley, who was fired by Schwarzenegger, raising questions about the governor's devotion to curbing global warming.

Two Senate committees will hold a joint hearing on Wednesday to look into Schwarzenegger's efforts to reduce pollution from the state government's cars and trucks by buying 1,138 flex-fuel vehicles that can run on ethanol. The San Jose Mercury News has reported that the flex-fuel vehicles haven't had access to ethanol and are instead running on gasoline, generating more smog and greenhouse gases than many other vehicles in the state's fleet.

Officials: Air unhealthy for high-risk groups today, Saturday

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, July 13, 2007

Forecasts call for Tulare County air quality to be unhealthy for sensitive groups later today and Saturday, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Ozone is responsible for the poor conditions, officials said. Those who suffer from asthma or other health conditions should avoid outdoor activities, use air conditioners at home and in their vehicles and make as few car trips as possible, officials recommend.

Rail yard neighbors holding breath

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Saturday, July 14, 2007

Neighbors hurried to April Johnston's house a week ago as a column of black smoke appeared to billow from the backyard.

There was no fire, Johnston reassured them. The smoke spewed from a locomotive in the Union Pacific rail yard that backs up to the shaded south Stockton house where she has lived for 35 years.

When this happens, as it often does, Johnston ushers any of her seven visiting grandchildren back into the house, closes the door and shuts all of the windows.

Health risk

Locomotives emit diesel fumes laced with tiny particles that penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, carrying toxins with them. In addition to cancer, diesel particulate pollution can cause respiratory illness and heart disease; children and seniors are especially vulnerable.

"You can't breathe. You have to run for cover," she said.

Studies released earlier this year by the California Air Resources Board show that, in theory at least, thousands of south Stockton residents face a greater risk of cancer depending on how close they live to the Union Pacific or Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail yards.

Similar studies are being done at 16 train yards throughout California as part of a plan to reduce the danger by 2020.

All San Joaquin Valley residents are at risk of developing cancer from air pollution, but living near a Stockton switching yard can increase that risk by anywhere from 2 percent to 50 percent if exposure lasts an entire lifetime, according to the state's data. Children are especially susceptible.

More than 36,000 residents face some degree of higher risk around the Union Pacific yard, the larger of the two yards. Fewer than a dozen, however, attended a public meeting held Thursday to explain the exposure studies.

"I love the fresh air, but there is no fresh air in our area," said Naomi Scott, 53, who has lived for 26 years on Milton Street near the BNSF yard. "I'm not allowed to open my windows most of the time."

Stockton's rail yards don't emit as much pollution as those in Roseville or the Southern California city of Commerce; they rank fourth and eighth out of 11 studies completed thus far.

The studies use 2005 data, and Harold Holmes of the air board said emissions today could be better than those of just two years ago.

Federal officials are tightening pollution standards for locomotives, and lower-emission trains are beginning to arrive at the Stockton rail yards.

Railroad officials are promising to do their part.

"We're kind of going through a cultural change as an industry," said Brock Nelson, an environmental expert for Union Pacific. "We've been around a long time, and we've done things the same way for a long time."

Locomotives may be a major polluter around the rail yards, but overall in the Valley, they account for less than 7 percent of diesel particulate matter emissions. Big rigs are a larger pollution source and are believed to increase cancer risk for those living along Interstate 5 and Highway 99.

About 84,000 locomotives chug through the two rail yards combined every year, and engines used to switch cars are known to idle on the tracks for an hour or longer.

The resulting fumes burn Johnston's nose and throat and give her brief headaches. She says the air has improved in recent years, but she is worried about her long-term exposure, having lived near switchyards most of her life.

"I've spent 55 of my 60 years inhaling that stuff," she said.

Grilling Green

By JESSIE MILLIGAN FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM
in the Modesto Bee, Saturday, July 14, 2007

Dry out the charcoal or check the propane. The backyard grilling season is hitting high gear.

The summer breezes are bound to be carrying the scent of tri-tip and burgers these days. Just remember that the U.S. Department of Energy advises that when the coals are ash and the gas is out, they aren't gone. They are in the air.

The millions of barbecues lighted nationwide on the Fourth of July consumed enough energy to equal the residential demand of a city of about 47,000 for an entire year, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates.

Particulates from grilled meats have been found in air-quality studies in Houston, Los Angeles and Atlanta. A Rice University study in 2003 said barbecuing was a small but significant source of particulate air pollution.

So it pays to grill smart.

Propane, natural gas and electric grills generally are considered easier on the air than charcoal. Proponents of charcoal argue that other fuels create serious emissions, just not in your own back yard.

Here's a tip: Limit your use of lighter fluids on days when air quality is bad, or use lighter-fluid alternatives. A charcoal chimney, available for \$10-\$20 at barbecue and home-supply stores, is a replacement for lighter fluid. Set it on the grill, roll up newspaper at the bottom, and pour in charcoal. Light the newspaper.

One example is the Weber RapidFire chimney with a "stay cool" handle. You still need to use heat-resistant barbecue mitts, but the handle doesn't get as hot as metal or wood. Cost is around \$13 at Home Depot.

Traditional charcoal briquettes contain wood scraps that normally would end up in a landfill, sawdust, coal, lime -- used to create the white ash -- binders made of wheat, corn or other plant starch, and borax, which releases briquettes from the mold.

Instant-light briquettes contain all those ingredients, plus an accelerant.

Tip: Let charcoal briquettes burn off accelerants before starting to cook.

Options: Several charcoal brands are releasing briquettes made without additives. One to try is the Original Charcoal Co. It makes Rancher, a nearly additive-free briquette made from South American hardwoods and bound together with yucca starch.

Lump charcoal, which also is called charwood or hardwood charcoal, contains wood from trees or sawmills or wood from scraps of flooring, building materials, furniture or pallets.

Watch out: This kind of charcoal isn't made into briquettes, so it retains the natural shape of the wood. The outside of the bags doesn't specify if you are getting tree wood or scraps from a factory. You'll know if you open the bag and see burnt pieces that resemble tongue-and-groove floorboards or other crafted shapes. Manufacturing scrap isn't necessarily bad, but consumers can't tell from the packaging information if the scrap is certified to be clean and chemical free.

One company, Lazzari, says it harvests only dead mesquite and pruned branches from live trees in its Mesquite Charcoal.

The bottom line: Think before you grill. It'll help the environment and improve your food.

Fuel-efficient car meets standards equal to hybrids

By Gregory J. Wilcox, Staff Writer
LA Daily News, July 15, 2007

You don't have to drive a hybrid to display an eco-friendly conscience.

Here in Los Angeles, motorists can tool around hydrocarbon central in a Ford Focus Partial Zero Emissions Vehicle.

What you get, according to Ford, is an affordable, fuel-efficient car that meets the same emissions standards as the industry's "best hybrids."

And a car that can get up to 37miles per gallon and is available in a variety of body styles and transmission choices.

What you won't get are tax credits or a free pass to drive solo in the diamond lanes.

You can literally extend the green theme to the exterior. The test model sported a kiwi green clear coat metallic paint job.

The PZEV badge is affixed to the right rear of 2007 Focus models sold in California with the 2.0-liter Duratec 20E engine. It's Ford's way of letting the buying public know about the company's clean-air choices.

There's an audience, too. Ford said this model accounts for about 97percent of Focus sales in the Golden State.

(This certification badging is also available on some Mercury, Volvo and Mazda models.)

In a Ford news release announcing the program last summer, the California Air Resources Board noted that not all hybrids meet the PZEV standards while some nonhybrids, such as the Focus, are cleaner.

And car companies do have to meet three air board standards to earn the designation.

They are requirements that a vehicle's tailpipe emissions must meet the Super Ultra-Low Emissions Vehicle standard, which is more than 80percent cleaner with respect to smog-forming emissions than the average 2007 vehicle; eliminate the escape of fuel vapor; and warranty coverage to ensure that the vehicle will meet PZEV requirements for 15 years or 150,000 miles.

Ford also put together some fun facts about PZEV.

Grilling one hamburger emits more hydrocarbon emissions than a Focus PZEV would on a three-hour drive (about 180miles). (I pumped out twice as many hydrocarbons doing this Thursday night.)

A Focus PZEV would have to be driven more than 2,100miles, or five trips between Los Angeles and San Francisco, to equal the emissions generated by the leading 5.4-horsepower lawn mower in just one hour of use.

The Focus PZEV is so clean it would take 330 of them running at the same time to equal the smog-forming emissions of one typical 1971 car, the first California emission-controlled vehicle.

You get the point.

In addition to showing the environment a softer side, the Focus also offers a pleasing driving experience in a small package.

The 136-horsepower, 2.0-liter, Duratec 20 dual-overhead-cam in-line four-cylinder engine, while not a screamer, provides adequate power.

More horsepower is available if buyers want additional oomph.

This was the SES model, and the package included 16-inch, five-spoke alloy wheels, fog lamps, enhanced suspension with rear stabilizer bar, automatic speed control, overhead console, tilt and telescoping leather-wrapped steering wheel, and a tachometer.

Inside, leather seats offered good support and enough leg room for drivers more than 6 feet tall.

A CD- and MP3-capable player is standard across the Focus lineup.

And there is lots of internal storage for such a small car. There is a drop-down drawer for six compact discs - located by the driver's left knee - and an open space just below the climate-control dials.

A center console houses the shifter, two cup holders, the parking brake lever and optional features, including the traction-control system and heater switches for the seats. There's also an overhead console with sunglasses holder, and space for a garage-door opener is optional.

And the front doors include molded-in beverage holders.

The rear seats fold down, but not completely flat. That can make for awkward stowage, and the Focus better accommodated a golf bag across the rear seats.

All in all, the Focus lives up to its billing. It's an affordable, clean ride that doesn't take a big bite out of your bank account or the planet.

Ford Focus SES

ENGINE: 2.0 liter DOHC

TRANSMISSION: Automatic

BRAKES: 4-wheel anti-lock

MPG: 27 city/37 highway

PRICE: \$16,540 base / \$20,530 as tested

THE MANUAL SAYS: Speedometer: Registers the engine speed.

THE WIFE SAYS: "Gee, it makes the garage look bigger," in referring to the Focus' diminutive dimensions.

Scientists conduct study of livestock farm air emissions

By The Associated Press - Rick Callahan

In Washington Post, Modesto Bee and Madera Tribune, July 14, 2007

INDIANAPOLIS- Scientists at eight universities are conducting the largest-ever study of air emissions at the nation's hog, dairy and poultry farms.

The study, which scientists hope will help improve methods of estimating any given farm's emissions, began this summer and will take an estimated 2 1/2 years to complete. It will measure levels of hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, nitrous oxide, particulate matter and other substances wafting from livestock buildings and manure lagoons at 20 farms in nine states.

Al Heber, a Purdue professor of agricultural and biological engineering who's leading the \$14.6 million study, said it will collect two continuous years of emissions data at each site.

Sensors will collect real-time data that are expected to help the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency devise science-based guidelines for livestock air emissions, which the agency regulates. Results are expected by the end of 2009, followed by a peer-review process.

"The bottom line is we're going to get just a ton of data and I think people all over the country are expecting that - regulators, livestock producers, everybody knows we're going to get a lot of good data," he said.

The study is required under a 2005 compliance agreement between the Environmental Protection Agency and the livestock industry. Although the agency is supervising the project, it's being financed by money livestock producers agreed to pay into a research fund under the agreement.

To date, more than 2,600 agreements have been signed with livestock companies that operate about 14,000 swine, dairy, egg-layer and broiler chicken farms in 42 states, said Jon Scholl, EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson's agriculture adviser.

A 2002 report by the National Academy of Sciences called on the EPA to improve its methods for estimating emissions from big livestock farms - research that will help determine if farms are complying with the Clean Air Act.

"We found that we really don't have the level of scientific information and data that's needed to make some sound policy calls in this area," Scholl said.

He said it's unclear whether the study's findings will have any impact on federal or state-level environmental regulations. The participating farms are in California, Indiana, Iowa, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

One of the farms is a 20,000-head hog farm about 50 miles northwest of Indianapolis in Carroll County owned by Marion Huffer and his relatives. Huffer said his farm was chosen in part because it's only about 30 miles from the main campus at Purdue, which is leading the study.

"We're hog farmers and we try to abide by all of the laws and be a good neighbor, so we just wanted to help out. It's good for us and it's good for the industry," he said.

But some environmental groups aren't convinced that the study will produce useful results.

The Washington-based Environmental Integrity Project is one of six environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, that's sued the EPA and livestock groups over their compliance agreement, contending that it essentially exempts livestock farms from the Clean Air Act.

Karla Raettig, a lawyer for the group, questions whether the study's sample size - 20 farms out of the 14,000 that have signed onto the compliance agreement - is too small to produce results that will reflect typical emissions from the nation's livestock farms.

"We're concerned that the sample size is awfully small - too small to yield data for what the EPA says they want it for," she said. "Without a bigger sample, we're very concerned that the data is not going to be reliable."

Heber said the 20-farm study is big enough to produce good science.

"We'd always like more, but this is going to get us a lot closer to the truth than what we have right now," he said. "It's a huge step forward scientifically for understanding farm emissions."

TIPS: Ways to Lighten Your Footprint

Washington Post, July 15, 2007

With the growing public interest in climate change, travelers are finding they can contribute to protecting and preserving the world's attractions. A report released last week by the National Parks Conservation Association -- "Unnatural Disaster: Global Warming and Our National Parks" -- cites myriad threats to America's park system from climate change: More wildfires. More destructive coastal storms. Damage to historic sites. Increased air pollution. Degraded habitat. Rising sea levels. Bigger downpours and the ensuing floods.

Here are some ways to improve the climate situation, or at least keep it from getting worse.

Look locally for vacation spots. Without flying and with minimal driving, you can often plan a great vacation and spend less money in the process.

- Travel less often and stay longer, rather than taking multiple short trips.
- Take the train; rail travel emits about half the carbon dioxide per person per mile as a car or a plane. If you have to fly, choose a nonstop flight over connecting service.
- When you get to your destination, walk, bike or take public transportation, or use fuel-efficient cars, to get around.
- Skip fuel-guzzling activities such as water-biking, snowmobiling and hot tubs, or enjoy them sparingly.
- Turn off lights that you don't need where you're staying. Ditto for computers and chargers.
- Request that hotel linens and towels not be washed every day.

- Buy locally grown food in places where you know it is safe to eat.
- Use environmentally healthy products. Worldwatch Institute lists ways to cut down on junk at <http://www.worldwatch.org/pubs/goodstuff>.
- Respect the natural environment. Leave animals and vegetation alone, and follow designated trails.
- Never purchase crafts, clothing, furniture or other products derived from protected or endangered species.
- Patronize "green" companies: travel agencies, hotels, resorts, restaurants and tour guides that promote energy and fuel efficiency, renewable energy, recycling, less packaging and other forms of environmental protection.

Over time, selective travelers can make a difference, says Jamie Sweeting, director for travel issues at the Washington policy group Conservation International. "Try to identify businesses and locations that try better to manage their environment," he says. "If they don't protect their assets, I think the more discerning consumer will say. 'I can choose between many hundreds of destinations.' "

'Greening' the outdoors begins in your backyard

Madera Tribune, July 14, 2007

Nurturing the environment starts at home, right in your backyard. There are countless steps the entire family can take to develop and care for their outdoor haven. Tending to the lawn and garden in environmentally focused ways triggers special rewards like the sweet taste of strawberries picked fresh from your edible garden or a nighttime serenade of crickets.

Backyard environmentalism produces enormous benefits: it can help conserve water, clear the air, benefit the lawn and attract garden wildlife, including hummingbirds.

Consider that an average lawn generates enough oxygen for a family of four by converting carbon dioxide into oxygen. The cooling effect of eight average-sized lawns can equal 70 tons of air conditioning, and grasses in the United States each year trap an estimated 12 million tons of dust and dirt in the air.

"Every family can truly make a difference in improving the environment by using effective stewardship practices in their yards," says Rich Martinez, chief environmental officer, The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company. "Awareness of these practices is key for homeowners and communities across the country to fully experience the benefits of healthy landscapes."

Here are some ways you can help the environment and enjoy the results outside your home and in the yard.

Water Use

- Use a layer of mulch around plants to reduce evaporation and retain moisture.
- Minimize evaporation by watering in the early morning when temperatures are cooler and winds are lighter.
- A mowing height of 3" allows the grass to have plenty of green leaves to foster a deep root system, which is able to better utilize moisture.
- Apply fertilizer only to the lawn for the best protection of the environment. If fertilizer lands on any hard surface, sweep the fertilizer back onto the lawn to keep it from being washed into the storm sewers.

Clear the Air

Plant trees on your property to help remove air pollution, filter water, sequester carbon, provide homes for wildlife and keep your home in the shade. Plant on the south or west side of the house for shade.

Leave grass clippings on the lawn to help recycle plant nutrients back into the soil.

Garden Delights

Spread a blanket of composted bark across the surface of bare soil to prevent weeds.

Choose easy-to-grow plants that are well-adapted or native to your region.

Enhance your garden by choosing plants with interesting flowers, foliage and fruits.

This summer, get the family outside for some fun in the dirt, while giving back to the environment. For more tips, visit www.scotts.com or www.kidsgardening.org/growonder <<http://www.kidsgardening.org/growonder>>.

Charbroiler rules proposed

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times, Saturday, July 14, 2007

Adding food to America's debate over dirty air, a Bay Area pollution agency has proposed requiring restaurants to install emission-control devices to capture smoke from restaurant charbroilers.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District is the first in California and believed to be the first large agency in the country to target the charbroilers with slotted grills. They have become popular with the California cuisine emphasis on grilling fresh meats and vegetables.

Some Bay Area restaurant operators are fuming.

They say the agency that pioneered pollution controls for cars, gas station pumps and oil refineries has gone too far by targeting the smoke from charbroiled steaks, hamburgers and chicken.

The filters and scrubbers would cost \$2,000 to \$5,000 to install and more to operate.

"They are using an enormous sledgehammer to go after a flea," said Daniel Scherotter, executive chef at Palio D'asti in San Francisco and vice president of the Golden Gate Restaurant Association. "The pollution from broilers is tiny. We're talking about cooking food."

But charbroiling is the cooking method that spews the most fine soot particles, which can cause lung and heart problems including asthma attacks in children and premature death among the sick and elderly, air pollution officials say.

Charbroiling accounts for about 2.5 tons a day of fine particles called PM 10, or about 1 percent of the total in the nine-county region, according to a report by the air district.

"Charbroiling is a big source of particulates, and we are very challenged in the Bay Area to meet the health standards for particulates," said Karen Schkolnick, an air district spokeswoman. "Our mission is to protect public health."

Charbroiling is prone to create smoke because fats and juices drip through grill openings onto flames and hot surfaces and then combust.

Cooking in pans, griddles and pots emits fewer particles in the air.

Studies in Southern California and Minnesota have implicated restaurant charbroiling as a significant source of particle pollution, and, to a lesser degree, gases that form smog and cause global warming, experts say.

After more than a year of studies and workshops, the Bay Area air district this spring proposed a rule to regulate two types of restaurant charbroilers.

In a largely uncontested proposal, the district proposed requiring filters on fast-food charbroilers that cook items on conveyor belts with heat sources above and below. Pollution districts in Southern California, the San Joaquin Valley and Ventura County already regulate these broilers.

The Bay Area district is breaking new ground by proposing controls on so-called under-fired charbroilers that use heat below to cook steaks, chicken and other meats.

Air district officials say they know of nowhere else in the country except Aspen, Colo., that has regulated this type of charbroiler.

"It's always tough when you regulate an industry that has not been regulated before," said Dan Belik, the air district's manager of rule development. "We've tried to be sensitive to that."

To avoid hardships for small restaurants, the air district wrote the under-fired charbroiler rule to apply to grills of at least 10 square feet. The standard was aimed at exempting restaurants serving fewer than 200 people a day, officials said.

About 500 restaurants in the Bay Area would be regulated under this approach, the district estimates.

Existing restaurants would have until June 2012 to put pollution filters on the under-fire charbroilers and until June 2008 to add controls to chain-driven charbroilers at fast-food places such as Burger King.

New restaurants would have to install the controls upon opening.

The district also proposes charging charbroiling restaurants a one-time registration fee of \$475, plus additional fees of \$135 per year to pay for district monitoring costs.

Some restaurant owners contend the proposed rule is unjustified and onerous.

They, along with some regional air board members, also contend that it would be unfair to restrict all charbroilers even though restaurant pollution varies widely with the type of foods cooked.

With their high-fat content, hamburgers generate far more particles than other charbroiled foods. Seafood gives off a fraction of the pollution that beef does.

"It doesn't seem fair to treat everyone the same," said Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty, a regional air board member.

Air district managers said they are trying to keep the rule as simple as possible so it's easy to understand and enforce.

After a contentious public hearing in May, a divided Bay Area air board postponed action on the rule so district managers can take a look at possible revisions.

The executive chef at Vic Stewart's, a Walnut Creek steakhouse, said he's not pleased at the prospect for steep new costs.

"It's natural burning material," said Tyler Dwyer. "When the fat drops, it burns, and that's what makes the taste of the food so good."

But, Tyler added, "If we have to do it, we will swallow the cost."

Scherotter, the chef at Palio D'asti, said he worries that restaurateurs would be tempted to switch to frying foods in butter or fats to avoid new costs for charbroilers.

"One of the things that makes California cuisine different is we grill a lot. It's healthier," Scherotter said. "I worry this rule could have the unintended effect of changing the way we cook."

Southland air quality panel delays voting on rules for building new power plants

L.A. Times, Saturday, July 14, 2007

The South Coast Air Quality Management District delayed a vote Friday on a set of rules for building new power plants. The proposed rules, which would allow plants to pay fees to make up for each pound of pollution they generate, would have given a boost to a planned 914-megawatt plant in Vernon.

The agency rescheduled the vote after AQMD board member and Chino Mayor Dennis Yates said he needed more time to review the scores of letters about the proposal.

"We all need to do our homework a little more with regard to this issue," added Santa Ana Mayor and AQMD board member Miguel Pulido.

But Tim Grabiell, staff attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said backers of the new rules asked for the delay because they could not marshal the votes. "They didn't vote on the matter because they would have lost," he said.

The NRDC and a handful of other clean-air groups fear the new rules would allow Vernon to build a natural gas-powered plant in a low-income, highly polluted section of southeast Los Angeles County. Backers of the plant said the facility would help the region prevent power outages.

System relies on ice to chill buildings

By Colleen Long, Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Monday, July 16, 2007

As the summer swelters on, skyscrapers and apartments around the city will be cranking up the air conditioning and pushing the city's power grid to the limit.

But some office towers and buildings have found a way to stay cool while keeping the AC to a minimum - by using an energy-saving system that relies on blocks of ice to pump chilly air through buildings.

The systems save companies money and reduce strain on the electrical grid in New York, where the city consumes more power on hot summer days than the entire nation of Chile.

It also cuts down on pollution. An ice-cooling system in the Credit Suisse offices at the historic Metropolitan Life tower in Manhattan is as good for the environment as taking 223 cars off the streets or planting 1.9 million acres of trees to absorb the carbon dioxide caused by electrical usage for one year.

Such a reduction in pollution is valuable in a city where the majority of emissions come from the operation of buildings. State officials say there are at least 3,000 ice-cooling systems worldwide.

"It is worth it to do in New York City," said William Beck, the head of critical engineering systems for Credit Suisse. "If you take the time to look, you can find innovative ways to be energy efficient, be environmental and sustainable."

Because electricity is needed to make the ice, water is frozen in large silver tanks at night when power demands are low. The cool air emanating from the ice blocks is then piped throughout the building more or less like traditional air conditioning. At night the water is frozen again and the cycle repeats.

Ice storage can be used as the sole cooling system, or it can be combined with traditional systems to help ease the power demands during peak hours. At Credit Suisse, for example, the company must cool 1.9 million square feet of office space at the Met Life tower, a historic building that was New York's tallest in the days before the Empire State Building.

In the basement, three main cooling rooms house chilling machines and 64 tanks that hold 800 gallons of water each. Credit Suisse has a traditional air conditioning system, but engineers use the more efficient system first.

Construction on the system took about four months, and company engineers say it is extremely efficient.

"The concept is the same, but when you make something mechanical, it can break, but a big block of ice four floors below grade level isn't going to do anything but melt," said Todd Coulard of Trane Energy Services. The company built the Credit Suisse system and is one of several that work with ice storage.

Trane, the air-conditioning arm of American Standard, also developed a system for Morgan Stanley's Westchester County offices, and just completed a new system for its offices on Fifth Avenue. A new Goldman Sachs headquarters will also have ice cooling. Credit Suisse is looking at installing the systems in offices around the globe, but nothing has been decided yet.

Coulard, an expert in energy efficiency, was hired by the company four years ago to develop the energy services department.

"I've been doing green since before it was cool," he said. "The idea of not only saving money for large companies, but doing something that benefits the environment is win-win. It's doing the right thing."

Engineers say the power-saving results from the system are impressive. And it translates into millions of dollars saved in energy bills for the companies.

Ice storage at Credit Suisse lowers the facility's peak energy use by 900 kilowatts, and reduces overall electric usage by 2.15 million kilowatt-hours annually - enough to power about 200 homes.

At the Morgan Stanley facility in Westchester County, the system reduces peak energy use by 740 kilowatts and overall electricity usage by 900,000 kilowatt hours annually.

Both companies received incentives from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority under a program designed to improve the power grid and help businesses reduce operating costs.

The technology isn't for every office space. There has to be room to install the large tanks. And costs are considerable: Credit Suisse spent more than \$3 million to renovate its cooling system; and Morgan Stanley's costs were comparable, which means the technology is best suited to large companies.

"This is for companies that want to go green but that there has to be other benefits, returns on investments," Coulard said. "It works for larger companies because their cooling costs are so considerable."

Politics, pollution collide in NYC plan

By Michael Gormley, Associated Press Writer

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle, Fresno Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Monday, July, 16, 2007

ALBANY, N.Y.-A proposed "congestion pricing" toll system to reduce traffic and pollution will be too expensive, its array of cameras for enforcement will threaten civil liberties, and downtown businesses will shrivel. New York City, 2007? Try London 2002.

Those were the dire predictions a half-decade ago when the British city pioneered what New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg hopes to repeat now. In London, the results include a drop in traffic congestion by 20 percent and similar decrease in carbon emissions in London's central zone since 2003.

But the plan to help fight global warming, in which cars would be charged \$8 and trucks \$21 to drive into Manhattan south of 86th Street, will first have to get through state lawmakers in Albany on Monday. It faces some strong opposition and bad timing.

In London, where the fees were about double what Bloomberg proposes, "there was enormous opposition, both politically and from business owners and ultimately it was approved through a long and arduous political process, much like we have here," said Steven Polan, a Manhattan lawyer who worked for London's government on its congestion pricing plan after working for New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

"The difference was," he said, "they don't have a state government there that stands between the federal government that wants to give out money and the city that wants to get it."

The U.S. Department of Transportation plans to choose up to three cities for pilot programs to combat traffic and pollution, providing up to \$500 million for each winner to implement the plan. In May, organizers of the C40 Large Cities Climate Summit in Manhattan said cities generate 80 percent of heat-trapping greenhouse gases yet cover less than 1 percent of the Earth's surface.

New York state Senate leader Joseph Bruno, a Republican, says Monday is the federal government's "drop-dead date" for New York to commit itself to Bloomberg's proposal.

But that commitment could take many forms. A letter signed by Gov. Eliot Spitzer, Bruno and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver might be enough. That wouldn't require a vote by the Democrat-led Assembly on Monday, which hasn't yet planned to reconvene to consider the measure. Silver, however, could raise the issue in a closed-door conference he called for Monday in Manhattan.

Silver, a Manhattan Democrat, hasn't publicly come out for or against the concept but has said incentives such as fare reductions and other measures might work better than tolls. He also believes a commission could be created after the state commits to congestion pricing to find the best way to implement any plan.

Supporters of Bloomberg's plan argue that hard choices are required for New York City's future. They also cite the immediate benefits: Clearing the air in "hot spots" that threaten children's health; reducing traffic congestion in a choked Manhattan striving to remain the world's financial epicenter; and the lure of up to \$500 million in federal funds. The Bloomberg administration predicts that street traffic would decrease by 6 percent in lower Manhattan during the three-year pilot project as more people use public transit.

But approval of Bloomberg's plan in Albany will likely require deft diplomacy, bipartisan cooperation and a thick skin in a Legislature long criticized as slow, dysfunctional and ruled absolutely by each chamber's majority party: Republicans in the Senate and Democrats in the Assembly.

It's also not the best time for quick agreement. In recent weeks Bruno has called Spitzer a spoiled brat and the governor has gone to Senate districts to trash Bruno and his senators as lazy and self-serving. Each has called for investigations of the other over charges of improper travel and political espionage.

Both, though, support congestion pricing.

"This is a time when they can show the bickering isn't carrying over to the policy arena-or conversely, that it is," said Lee Miringoff of the Marist College poll that tracks New York politics. "But regardless, it's a tough sell to the public."

A WNBC/Marist Poll released last week Wednesday found 61 percent of residents in New York City and its surrounding suburbs oppose Bloomberg's plan. Within Manhattan, 48 percent support the plan and 46 percent oppose it.

The plan has also created rare alliances between Republican senators in the suburbs who see a dreaded commuter tax and Democratic Assembly members in the city who worry about the cost to outer borough residents and civil liberties with all those cameras.

For Bloomberg, the Republican-turned-independent, congestion pricing could be a global warming victory in any presidential bid next year as well as an important piece of his legacy as mayor. He'll set up shop Monday in Albany to push for approval.

The issue is also important for the Senate's Republican majority. Billionaire Bloomberg's significant campaign contributions have helped the Senate Republicans cling to a slim and shrinking majority and the popular

mayor's endorsements in the 2008 legislative campaigns could be critical in some New York City districts targeted by Democrats looking to take control of the chamber.

Southern Utilities Resist Renewables

By *BEN EVANS*, The Associated Press

Washington Post and Sacramento Bee, July 14, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Six of the nation's 10 largest sources of carbon dioxide emissions are coal-fired power plants in the South, but year after year Southern lawmakers balk at pushing utilities toward cleaner renewable energy.

Last month, Republican senators from the South provided about half the votes that defeated federal legislation to require power companies to get 15 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020. Nationally, almost half the states have adopted their own renewable mandates, but only one, Texas, is in the South.

Southern lawmakers _ responding to heavy lobbying from local utilities _ argue their region isn't conducive to solar or wind power like the sun-baked Southwest or the open plains of the West.

But many leading scientists and environmental advocates say Southern states have plenty of alternative-energy potential. Utilities have simply grown comfortable with cheap, dirty coal and haven't been forced to change, they say.

"If you look at other regions of the country where renewables have taken off, it's been because of mandates, and that's why you haven't seen it take off in the South," said Nicholas Rigas, director of the South Carolina Institute for Energy Studies at Clemson University. "Once the development starts it will be just as successful as it is in other states."

The South has long relied on coal for electricity. Its two largest utilities _ Atlanta-based Southern Co. and Charlotte, N.C.-based Duke Energy Corp. _ produce about two-thirds of their power from coal, mostly burned in aging plants not yet upgraded with clean-air technologies.

Southern Co. puts more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than any other U.S. utility.

Its Scherer plant near Macon, Ga., for several years has been the nation's single largest source of the greenhouse gas, which most scientists believe contributes to global warming. Duke Energy isn't far behind, ranking third in carbon dioxide emissions, while the Tennessee Valley Authority ranks fourth, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Many of the companies' plants also rank among the worst in emissions of mercury, a neurotoxin, and other pollutants that cause smog, respiratory problems and acid rain.

The utilities _ among the largest political donors in Washington _ vehemently oppose federal mandates. They argue that "one size fits all" standards would drive up Southern utility bills and urge that new technologies be phased in gradually.

Southern Co., which reported profits of \$1.6 billion in 2006, questions the existence of global warming even as other utilities acknowledge it must be addressed.

"If we are irrational about it and we cripple our economy or cripple our industry and we realize carbon dioxide wasn't the source of the problem, then we'll be real regretful," said Chris Hobson, senior vice president for research and environmental affairs at Southern Co., which owns Alabama Power Co., Georgia Power Co. and other subsidiaries.

But the demand for renewable energy is growing.

"Coal is the dominant source of global warming pollution," said Michael Shore, who directs Southeastern air quality programs at Environmental Defense, a private lobbying group. "It is critical that states in the Southeast embrace energy efficiency and renewables if we are to take responsibility for global warming."

Scientists find that pollution from economic powerhouse is flying across the Pacific and affecting air on the West Coast

CHINA EMISSIONS HEAD TO U.S.

By Jeff Barnard, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, July 15, 2007

MOUNT BACHELOR SUMMIT, Ore. -- In a frigid shelter at the top of Mount Bachelor, Dan Jaffe brushed the snow from a rough plywood table, laid out a clean tissue and unscrewed a stainless steel fitting from one of his scientific instruments.

The University of Washington at Bothell professor of atmospheric and environmental chemistry removed a one-inch disk with a hole in the center. There, on a shiny film of grease, five dull black dots made up of tiny soot particles appeared. He passed it around for the graduate students to see.

"Some of those particles came from Asia," he said.

At 9,000 feet at the crest of the Cascade Range, the air is some of the cleanest to be found anywhere in the United States. But each breath -- especially in the spring -- can suck in tiny amounts of pollution from China and elsewhere in Asia. Soot, dust and chemicals come from coal-fired power plants, cars and trucks, forest fires, desert dust storms and even wood cooking fires.

China now emits more carbon dioxide -- the atmospheric pollutant that is primarily responsible for global warming -- than any other nation. But scientists working on mountaintops, with computer models and with aircraft stuffed with instruments are also worried about the effects of these lesser-known pollutants.

"One might think of these sources as small in terms of their contribution. But it's a contribution on top of what we already have," said John Spengler, professor of environmental health and human habitation at the Harvard School of Public Health.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognizes that air pollution travels great distances, said Bill Wehrum, EPA's acting assistant administrator for air and radiation.

What is not known, he said, "is how much pollution is moving over those distances, how much real impact it is having on public health downwind in the environment.

"The Europeans are asking that question about emissions from the United States. Asians are asking that question about emissions from Europe. And the United States is asking that question about emissions from Asia."

Finding pollution

In 1994, Jaffe was in Oslo, Norway, on sabbatical when he came across a computer model that indicated that pollutants in the Arctic were coming from China.

Back in the States, he secured a grant from the National Science Foundation to measure them. His first observatory was on Cheeka Peak, a 1,598-foot mountain on the tip of Washington's rainy Olympic Peninsula about 120 miles east of his home in Seattle.

In 1999, Jaffe took instruments to higher altitudes in airplanes flying off Washington and California. They found more pollution, particularly between 6,000 feet and 20,000 feet.

That led him in 2004 to the 9,000-foot summit of Mount Bachelor, a ski resort in the Cascade Range of Central Oregon, and to its ski lift house.

Hooded air intakes handcrafted from sheet metal lead to tiny rooms packed with instruments that measure carbon monoxide, ozone, mercury, soot and radon. Jaffe can read the instruments on his office computer but must visit the site every few months to keep things running.

Since 2000, satellites have been able to watch dust, soot, ozone and nitrous oxides as they are blown across the Pacific at high altitudes. The dust and soot are visible. The gases show up in refracted wavelengths of light bouncing back to the satellites.

"By looking at the ratios of different pollutants, particularly carbon monoxide and mercury, we can actually say the ratio of these pollutants we are seeing here at Mount Bachelor matches the ratio of pollutants coming right out of China," Jaffe said.

"This is, in effect, a fingerprint -- a chemical fingerprint. When we see all these indicators, meteorological data, the satellite data, the pollutants fingerprint, we can be very confident these are pollutants coming across from Asia."

Staci Simonich, an assistant professor at Oregon State, also has instruments on top of Mount Bachelor. She and her graduate students are looking for things such as pesticides and PCBs, an industrial chemical outlawed in this country that causes cancer. The toxins attach to their own favorite sizes of dust and soot.

Although levels are very low, "it's only going to increase from everything we know about the use of energy in those countries," Simonich said.

The spring offers prime conditions for pollution to travel from China to the United States. That's when a low pressure area forms over the east China Sea or the Sea of Japan, combined with a cold front that kicks the pollutants up into the free troposphere, the clear air above the haze you see when you take off in an airplane. The prevailing winds blow east to west, sending the pollutants straight across to the United States.

In 2003, Jaffe and Dave Parrish of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration published a paper that found an increase in ozone over the Pacific of 10 parts per billion in 18 years.

"That's a fairly significant rate in that background air is only about 40 parts per billion and the standard is 80 parts per billion," Jaffe said. "That is going to make it harder for us to meet our own air quality standards."

And those standards are likely to be getting tougher. On June 21, the EPA proposed lower limits for ground-level ozone, the principle component of smog, saying the current standards don't protect the public health.

Daniel Jacob, professor of atmospheric chemistry and environmental engineering at Harvard University, says that Asian emissions are growing 5 percent to 10 percent a year, and the trend is likely to continue through the next decade. He manages the GEOS-Chem computer model, developed by scientists around the world to study the effects of global emissions on U.S. air quality.

"The cars and factories we have in the United States are among the cleanest in the world, and it's difficult to make them cleaner," Jacob said. "So the question is whether we should maybe invest some basic air pollution controls in China as a more cost-effective way of dealing with some of the pollution problems we have."

The United States and the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group, are working with China to increase the efficiency of energy production and boost conservation; Premier Wen Jiabao has pledged to reduce energy use against gross domestic product by 20 percent by 2010. Last year, energy use fell by 1.2 percent, short of the first-phase goal of 4 percent.

Barbara Finamore, who heads the council's China program, said the United States has an obligation to help: "The U.S. has outsourced much of its manufacturing to China and therefore outsourced the pollution inherent in that manufacturing, and that is what is coming back to haunt us."

But it is a tremendous challenge.

"Literally, there are millions of Chinese people who don't have cookstoves who actually cook on an open fire in the home they have," EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson said.

China uses twice as much energy per unit of gross domestic product as the world average and 10 times more than Japan, the world leader in efficiency. And more than half of the 800,000 deaths each year blamed on urban air pollution occur in China, according to the World Health Organization.

Meanwhile, China is expected to build 140 new coal-fired power plants during the next three years, and each one will last 30 to 70 years, Johnson said. "So what they do today will have a lasting legacy."

Searching higher

While Jaffe is focused on pollution at mountaintop elevations, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, director of the Center for Clouds, Chemistry, and Climate at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, is looking higher.

He and Jeff Stith of the National Center for Atmospheric Research lead an international research team that is looking at dust and particulates blowing across the Pacific as high as 30,000 feet.

A Gulfstream-V jet jammed with scientific instruments scoops up air samples and analyzes them. The jet flies between Japan, Hawaii and Alaska, climbing from near the ocean's surface to 50,000 feet, constructing a profile of the layers of dust.

"For the first time, we are following the dust," said Ramanathan. "Literally, we are baby-sitting it all the way from Japan across the Pacific Ocean into North America."

Ramanathan is primarily interested in the weather and global warming ramifications of soot and dust. A study published this year in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, based on computer models, found that tiny particles from Asia are helping to produce stronger and more frequent storms over the Pacific.

It comes back to the idea that the individual droplets of water vapor that make up clouds need a nucleus to form. Nature has always provided dust and soot from forest fires and dust storms in Mongolia; now combustion from cars and trucks, coal-fired power plants and millions of cooking fires are providing more.

At the same time, "by sheer dumb luck" pollution has actually helped reduce global warming by helping to form low-elevation clouds made of water vapor that reflect sunlight and heat back into space, said Ramanathan.

But when those tiny particles of soot rise to 25,000 feet, they help form clouds made of ice. Instead of reflecting sunlight, they act like another blanket on a cold winter night, trapping the heat of the earth.

Based on earlier measurements, 25 million kilograms to 30 million kilograms of soot floats over the Pacific, and about 75 percent of that is from Asia, said Ramanathan.

"At one point in the middle of the Pacific, it looked like a wall of dust," said Ramanathan. "That's when I started to imagine it was like Genghis Khan. If he were to invade he would come behind this wall of dust.

"But we are ready for him thanks to this aircraft. We can measure it."

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Sunday, July 15, 2007:](#)

Making sense of pollution markets

Trading carbon credits will clean up state better than heavy-handed regulation

By Joe Nation

Here are my imaginary results from a public opinion survey taken in late June:

-- Teenagers (and adults) who closely followed Paris Hilton's jailhouse stint? 87 percent

-- Adults who can name the United Kingdom's new prime minister? 4 percent (Sorry, Mr. Brown)

-- Californians who understand how a carbon market will reduce greenhouse gas emissions? 1 percent (with a margin of error of 3 percent)

These survey results are made-up, of course, but they may reflect the state of public opinion, especially as it relates to greenhouse gases and climate change. Californians cheered the passage of AB32, California's Global Warming Solutions Act, as a positive step toward cooling the Earth and clearing the air but few know how it works. Will it really reduce greenhouse gases? And why is California heading in a direction that, as many say, gives the right to pollute for a price?

The explanation begins with the climate change policies we are developing. The Kyoto Protocol, adopted by nearly 170 nations -- but not the United States -- established the first regulated carbon market. AB32 is expected to lead to the creation of a carbon market in California. Some activists, notably the Climate Protection Campaign, have even argued for personal carbon budgets (i.e., individual limits on greenhouse gas emissions).

This carbon market, sometimes referred to as "cap and trade," does allow pollution for a price. But it limits the total by issuing (by fiat) maximum greenhouse gas emissions or by auctioning these pollution rights. Either of those actions creates a market where emissions permits can be traded.

At first glance, a carbon market is like most other commodity markets, such as oil or wheat, or a consumer market for food, cars, MP3 players, and so on. Sellers offer a product at a price, buyers offer to buy, and a market with fairly stable and predictable quantities and prices emerges.

Critics of carbon markets object mostly on philosophical grounds, arguing that we can't put a price on clean air, clean water or slowing climate change. Instead, they advocate regulation. But history has shown that regulation typically costs much more and may lead to poorer results. For example, the acid rain trading program (a cap-and-trade system to control sulfur dioxide emissions from power plants has achieved program cost savings estimated at up to 65 percent compared with a purely regulatory approach.

So the question is, how will a carbon market reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Some critics, in fact, suggest that a carbon market won't reduce emissions.

AB32 sets an economy-wide cap on greenhouse gas emissions in California. In addition, individual entities will face annual emission caps. Let's assume a very simple world with only two companies (called simply Company A and Company B), each with an emissions limit of 100 tons of carbon dioxide, the major greenhouse gas. In the first year, economy-wide emissions are 200 tons.

Obviously, in this first year, there is no required reduction in greenhouse gases -- we simply maintain the status quo. But in subsequent years, because AB32 calls for declining economy-wide emissions, each company will be forced to reduce their emissions. Without that economy-wide cap and reduction, critics would be right: the carbon market would result in the trading of greenhouse gas emissions, but no overall reductions in pollution.

The overall reductions required by AB32 are substantial: a return to 1990 emission levels by the year 2020, about a 35 percent reduction from where we are today when we include anticipated economic growth. In this simple example, each company must cut 35 tons of emissions, or 70 tons total. Both companies would likely begin to reduce their own emissions by installing solar panels, buying biogas digesters, improving insulation, and other emissions-reduction measures. In fact, each will try to reduce as much as possible because failing to reduce will result in stiff financial penalties. In Europe's system, for example, the penalty for failing to meet targets is about double the market price for a credit for one ton of carbon dioxide, and it jumps to five times that price in 2008.

Assume that Company A reduces its emissions by 50 tons, more than its fair share of 35 tons. Assume also that Company B falls short, reducing only 20 tons. (Company B probably fell short because the costs of reducing were far higher than for Company A.) Since Company B has missed its reduction target, it must purchase the extra 15 tons from Company A. In the end, Company A is rewarded, and Company B is penalized.

Under a regulated approach, Company A would have stopped reducing at 35 tons. And Company B would have either been forced to reduce 35 tons (rather than 20) or face large fines. That regulated approach may have led to the same result, but the total costs to society would almost certainly have been higher.

Here's the key point: Each company has a financial incentive to reduce as much as possible. That incentive will remain as long as overall reductions are required.

And here's another key point. As long as there is a declining cap, a carbon market will reduce greenhouse gas emissions more than a regulated approach, and those reductions will cost less. That market does put a price on pollution. However, contrary to criticism, this market makes polluters pay more while the good guys pay less. And that is exactly the approach needed to beat climate change.

Joe Nation a former member of the state Assembly from Marin County, teaches climate change at Stanford University.

[Guest editorial, Tracy Press, Friday, July 13, 2007:](#)

We can stop Site 300 again

The Department of Homeland Security on Wednesday rejected Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's bid to house a bio-warfare agent research facility at Site 300, 6 miles from Tracy. The facility, which will be the size of five Wal-Marts, would have housed some of the world's most lethal pathogens.

The main reason why Site 300 was not selected, despite the lab's intense lobbying, was because the community vehemently opposed the facility. Residents spoke loudly and clearly opposing the dangerous facility. They wrote letters, made phone calls, signed petitions and sent e-mails to the Department of Homeland Security. The Tracy City Council also wrote a letter opposing the facility. As a result, the federal government was forced to listen.

However, Tracy is not out of the woods yet, as they say, because dangerous plans for new bomb blasts are still pending for Site 300. Community opposition can stop this as well.

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory has re-applied for permits from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to increase open-air explosive testing at Site 300 by 8 times per year. (The original application was canceled after the lab failed to include key data in its application, such as the types and amounts of radioactive and toxic emissions from the explosions.) The new application confirmed the community's worst fears that these blasts will possibly release tons of aerosolized depleted uranium and other toxic substances into the air without any control technology to filter out particles that can travel with the wind.

Under the proposed plan, there will be about 60 toxic and radioactive substances released as a result of open-air explosions. The lab will also explode up to 4,500 pounds of depleted uranium annually. Depleted uranium creates a triple health threat as a heavy metal, as a hazardous chemical catalyst and as a radioactive substance. The health threats from these dangers range from cancer, to birth defects, to heart problems, to DNA damage. These depleted uranium explosions will occur without any control technologies to

reduce airborne emissions. As a result, when the wind blows toward Tracy, it could carry some depleted uranium to residents. Also, what the air doesn't carry away will likely find its way into the ground water. Furthermore, residential development continues to move closer and closer to the Site 300 boundary. More than 5,000 family homes are planned not far from the fence line of Site 300.

A critical meeting is taking place soon and community presence is needed. It will be at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday in the City Council chambers at Tracy City Hall, 333 Civic Center Plaza. At this meeting, the air pollution regulators will provide information about these tests and the permit approval process. I encourage everybody from the community to attend and give input about the lab's attempt to increase open air explosive testing. Not only will an eightfold increase in explosive testing result in further contamination to the site, it may also negatively impact the surrounding people and environment.

Only by demanding that the air district carefully consider the environmental harm the lab's plan will surely have can we stop increased weapon's testing and pollution in our community. The lab wants to resume these harmful tests, so please go to the hearing Wednesday and voice concern over the proposed eightfold increase in explosive testing.

Consider this: Site 300, the lab's explosive test range off Corral Hollow Road, already contains enough toxic and radioactive waste from past bomb blasts to qualify for federal Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund list of most contaminated sites in the nation. Although modest cleanup efforts are under consideration, the toxic and radioactive pollution has contaminated the ground water and is moving toward the Central Valley at a rate of up to 100 feet per year. We need to clean up past contamination and not create new hazards.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Monday, July 16, 2007:](#)

New crop for the valley - solar energy panels

The Bay Area has Silicon Valley. Why can't we be Solar Valley?

Companies are showing a growing interest in the San Joaquin Valley for a reason that most residents take for granted - our abundant sunshine.

A San Francisco startup company has announced plans for a solar facility in western Fresno County that would produce 80 megawatts, enough to provide electricity to 20,800 homes. Unless someone builds a bigger complex before then, it would be the largest solar facility in the world when it opens in 2011.

Several solar plants already operate in the southern San Joaquin Valley, and the north valley is getting inquiries. Bill Bassitt, chief executive officer of the Stanislaus Economic Development and Workforce Alliance, said his organization is working with a company interested in building a plant in Stanislaus County.

Solar is an exciting field, but if we are to capitalize on this convergence of commerce, energy prices and tax incentives, the San Joaquin Valley needs to prepare in three critical areas: government, education and finance.

Local governments need to be working with the solar industry to get the training so they will understand exactly how the industry works and what it needs to succeed. Our planners and others, who may not be used to seeing this kind of business, should become experts on the nuances of the industry so they can move projects through the planning process efficiently.

Regional adult schools, colleges and universities need to have training programs in place so our work force is positioned to take the new jobs that a vibrant solar sector would provide. We don't want people from outside the region swooping in to take the hundreds of well-paying jobs expected to come with this industry. We need to get a talent pool trained and ready to go.

Not only will the energy companies themselves need workers, but it's logical that manufacturing companies will spring up to produce the equipment they need.

Finally, we need banks, investors and others who are savvy to the financial services required by these new businesses. There are many investors outside the region who are experts in this industry. We need that expertise inside the valley.

We have an opportunity to be creative and innovative here. There is no reason that we shouldn't be masters of this industry so we can facilitate this investment and make the valley the most attractive place to locate a solar energy business.

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Monday, July 16, 2007:](#)

Editorial: New air board appointee, same dubious policy?

Governor and Nichols need to make clear that they are serious about protecting air

When Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last month fired Robert Sawyer, the chairman of the California Air Resources Board, the governor's aides jumped into spin mode to claim that Sawyer wasn't adequately protective of the environment.

Aides say the governor was angry after Sawyer and the air board voted last month to seek an 11-year delay from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to meet smog standards in the San Joaquin Valley. There's evidence to back up that claim. On June 22, before Schwarzenegger fired Sawyer, the governor delivered an unusual public rebuke of the air board, and urged his appointees to revisit their decision.

"When one out of six residents in the San Joaquin Valley has been diagnosed with asthma and one in five children carry an inhaler to school, it is a call to action," the governor said. The governor's statement suggested that, once Sawyer exited the picture, his replacement would take a different course of action. Yet days after the governor picked Mary Nichols as air board chair, an editorial writer asked her if she would reverse her predecessor's decision on the San Joaquin Valley. Instead, she seemed to endorse it.

Provisions of the Clean Air Act, said Nichols, "make it difficult for CARB to do anything other than what they did."

"The basic situation," she added, "is that the Valley is out of compliance with federal air standards, and they have to submit an attainment plan. They can't submit an approvable plan under the current circumstances because they haven't put enough regulations into effect to allow them to demonstrate attainment within the statutory guidelines."

Nichols is undoubtedly an expert in federal pollution laws, having worked at the EPA and previously as air board chair. She is right to suggest that the Clean Air Act includes provisions -- curious ones -- that often force local air districts to seek delays in compliance, instead of coming up with creative solutions for cleaner air now.

Even so, this page and a number of environmental groups, doctors and other health professionals remain unconvinced that seeking a designation of "extreme nonattainment" is the only option for the San Joaquin Valley. Not only does this designation give the local air district an extra 11 years beyond 2013 to reduce asthma-causing smog, it allows the district to delay releasing a detailed plan for reducing emissions from dairies, construction contractors, truckers and other sources of pollution.

Families with sick kids and ailing elders need more assurance of action than the air board has offered to date. The administration's delay of rules on diesel soot from construction equipment -- a delay granted after heavy lobbying by the industry -- doesn't help provide this assurance.

Nichols is scheduled to face a hearing this week in front of the Senate Rules Committee. The committee should confirm her appointment.

But Nichols needs to send a strong statement that she won't accept business as usual in the San Joaquin Valley, or any place in the state where the health of millions of people is compromised. The governor has made his priorities clear. Now it's up to him -- and his appointees -- to turn them into cleaner air for all Californians.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Sunday, July 15, 2007:](#)

What if the new chief can't make air board hustle?

What happens if Mary Nichols can't, or won't, do the job? That's the question Gov. Schwarzenegger needs to ask as he ponders the chessboard of his political future.

The Legislature, meanwhile, must be willing to ask difficult questions during her confirmation as chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board. Just being a Democrat shouldn't provide her with a free pass.

The governor caused a political dust storm in June when he fired air board Chairman Robert Sawyer, saying it was because CARB wasn't moving fast enough to meet federal standards for the amount of ozone in San Joaquin Valley air. Ozone is a harmful and essential ingredient in smog, and we have way too much of it. Activists want the state to meet federal standards by 2018. The air board opted to follow the lead of its regional agency and endorsed a 2024 deadline.

That led to Sawyer's firing and the resignation of Executive Director Catherine Witherspoon two days later. Their very public disgruntlement caused a furor, and it appeared that a Hummer had run into the governor's vaunted green credentials.

So Schwarzenegger hired the widely admired Nichols to restore his green cred. That move might work. But what about the real problem - making valley air safer to breathe sooner rather than later?

When asked if she would try to meet the 2018 ozone deadline, Nichols demurred: "When I spoke with the governor, he raised this question with me." Then she explained, "I actually had an opportunity to brief him on the provisions of the Clean Air Act ... which makes it difficult for CARB to do anything."

A longer deadline, she said, would give the state more time to find solutions. Besides, "I don't think even if California wanted to reconsider, we would be allowed to do so."

But the air board has not submitted its implementation plan. Until it does, everything is on the table - including the ozone deadline.

Our governor likes to discuss difficult issues in the haze of his smoking tent. Perhaps if Nichols and members of the air board were to join him in the tent, he could help them see the necessity of moving more quickly. Unless, of course, his environmental credentials are no more substantial than clouds of cigar smoke.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Sunday, May 15, 2007](#)

Farmers want fresher air

Cardoza's changes to the 2007 farm bill would help them out

Farming can be messy. Plowing and harvesting is dirty work, pesticides must be handled with care, and we haven't even mentioned tending cows. Some of that mess gets kicked up into the San Joaquin Valley's horribly polluted air. Farming creates about 25 percent of our air pollution; trucks, cars, trains and suburban fireplaces create most of the rest.

Though only partial contributors, farmers and their friends in Congress are uniquely positioned to help the situation.

Unfortunately, it's going to take a fight.

Rep. Dennis Cardoza is proposing changes in the 2007 farm bill that would provide an additional \$305 million over five years for air quality programs in areas that have lots of farming and very bad air. The San Joaquin Valley is at the top of that list.

The 2007 farm bill will detail \$285 billion in spending over the next five years. Cardoza feels more of that should be spent on air, land and water conservation; better nutrition programs for school kids; and research on "specialty" crops such as almonds, wine grapes and organics.

He laid it out in House Resolution 1600, a "marker" bill he wants incorporated into the larger farm bill. About 100 representatives from New York to Florida to Oregon are co-sponsors - including Jim Costa of Fresno, George Radanovich of Mariposa and most of the California delegation.

But not everyone agrees that more money should be spent to improve air in farm communities and to help the nation's children eat healthier - at least not if that money to pay for it comes from the pockets of Midwestern farmers.

Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., heads the House Agriculture Committee, which is packed with members from states whose farmers get direct payments for growing wheat, corn, soybeans, rice, sugar and cotton. A few valley farmers get subsidy checks, but most grow unsubsidized crops: almonds, grapes, melons - a cornucopia too huge to list. They don't want federal subsidies, but they do want, and deserve, federal help.

As we said, farming is messy. State and federal regulators don't like messes, so valley farmers are saddled with the world's most restrictive and costly environmental requirements. Farmers who won't complain about commodity prices complain bitterly about meeting those requirements.

Yet, most know what to do. Farmers already have reduced airborne dust and soot, cut carbon emissions and captured methane - often with federal or state aid.

Stanislaus County farmers have received \$13.4 million in federal grants to reduce air pollution since 2002. San Joaquin got \$14.3 million; Merced, \$13.4 million. It paid for the chipping of orchard debris, methane digesters and dust suppression.

In five years, 761 grants were awarded in Stanislaus County. But last year, nearly a fourth of those who applied were rejected. Their projects were sound, but there wasn't enough money.

"More funding in (the program) will help a lot," said Ashley Boren of Sustainable Conservation. "Right now, the program's oversubscribed; you have a lot more farmers applying than there is funds."

That's why Cardoza is adamant.

"Basically (the proposals) allow farmers in high-cost areas like ours to comply with federal mandates on the environment, pesticide applications and air quality issues," Cardoza said. "It allows them to stay in business. ... (It) allows farmers to continue to do what they've done historically and to comply with good practices."

In spending \$285 billion, Congress should be able to find more money for conservation projects that work, especially when more than \$20 billion a year is tied up in payments to fewer than 10 percent of the nation's farmers.

Yet Peterson insists on the status quo: continued big payments to farmers more comfortable sitting in a boardroom than on top of a tractor. He's offered to support Cardoza's proposal as a separate bill.

That was a ploy. A separate measure wouldn't have any money attached, making it meaningless under the Democrats' pay-as-you-go requirements.

"Nobody wants to devastate the Midwest," Cardoza said, "but there are some important reforms that need to take place. Major portions of HR 1600 have to be in the farm bill or I can't support it."

Tuesday, members of the House Agriculture Committee begin "marking up" the 650-page farm bill, detailing priorities. It's unlikely any real reform will make it out of the committee.

But that's only the first inning of this game. Last year, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi put Cardoza on the powerful House Rules Committee. Once the farm bill leaves the Ag Committee (with or without Cardoza's proposals), it goes to the Rules Committee. There, it can be changed and the Rules Committee determines which amendments will be debated in the full House.

That's where Cardoza will start playing hardball. He'll need all his allies, such as Fresno's Costa, and the support of every member of the California delegation.

Some, like Wally Herger of Chico, Joe Baca of San Bernardino, David Dreier of Glendora, Jerry Lewis of Redlands and Grace Napolitano of Santa Fe Springs, are not yet committed. They need to get off the fence. More importantly, Pelosi must use her considerable clout to make certain the 2007 farm bill benefits all Americans, not just a small minority of farmers growing subsidized crops.

Those who operate cars, trucks and trains bear more responsibility than do farmers for creating this devil's soup of foul air. They can't be let off the hook.

But farmers, at least, are willing to do their share; they deserve all the help they can get.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Monday, July 16, 2007:](#)

Should gas mileage standards be raised:

Yes: This is key to solving global warming threat

By Matt Auer - McClatchy-Tribune

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' oil embargo of 1973-74 inspired Congress to promulgate Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards for passenger cars and light trucks. This marked the end of a carefree era when eight-cylinder, twin-fin sedans plied America's roadways.

Fuel economy standards grew stricter during the 1970s and partway through the 1980s. But gas prices drifted downward in the 1990s and lawmakers lost interest in fuel economy. CAFE standards stalled at 27.5 miles per gallon for cars and 20.7 mpg for light trucks and haven't budged for 20 years.

It's time for stricter standards and for reasons more urgent than in the 1970s. More is at stake than pain at the gas pump and the damage inflicted on America's economy by high oil prices.

Worldwide, cars and trucks generate about 25 percent of all global warming pollution. Higher CAFE standards mean less gas consumed per mile driven, and hence less emitted carbon dioxide. What's more, on a cost basis, high fuel economy cars and trucks easily beat alternative carbon-cutting strategies such as solar energy, wind power, and carbon capture and storage.

Some naysayers contend that if cars become more fuel efficient, driving will become cheaper and drivers will spend more time on the road, thereby negating environmental advantages and energy savings. But research shows that high fuel economy does not inspire gluttonous driving habits.

There are reasons other than planetary habitability -- if that wasn't reason enough -- to boost auto fuel economy. Our "addiction to oil" as President Bush appropriately framed it, directly or indirectly puts U.S. soldiers in harm's way. The United States could be more flexible in how it uses its political and military assets abroad were it not so dependent on foreign oil.

In June, the Senate passed legislation raising CAFE standards to 35 mpg by 2020 for cars and trucks. This was one highlight of an energy bill that had as many disappointments as achievements. Among the downsides was an 11th-hour abandonment of provisions to ratchet up CAFE standards by 4percent annually.

Conceivably, Detroit could achieve an average fuel economy of 35 mpg for its cars and trucks by 2020 without legislation, though GM, Ford and Chrysler's chief executive officers would no sooner admit that possibility than drive around in Hondas.

In fact, Honda shows the way. More than 50 percent of the vehicles it sells get 30 mpg or higher on highways. Toyota's Prius, a hybrid gas-electric car, gets 60 mpg in urban driving. These cars also generate comparatively less greenhouse gases and smog-forming chemicals per mile driven.

By and large, Honda, Toyota and VW's higher fuel economy cars perform well in safety tests, including front and side crash and rollover tests, belying claims that fuel efficient cars or autos with "light frames" are less safe. Car manufacturers learned years ago that structural design is more essential to car safety than weight.

Dismal safety records of some early model, heavy-frame sport utility vehicles reinforce this lesson.

Relatively fuel-efficient, safe and affordable cars from Japan and Germany already have charmed millions of American car owners. It's a shame Detroit lacked the foresight of its overseas competitors, who in the 1990s made contingency plans for a future of sharply higher gas prices.

The Senate's bill might be remembered as a turning point in Detroit's revival, because the Big Three were forced to produce high quality, fuel-efficient cars customers actually demanded.

This upbeat story requires, in part, that the House preserve the Senate's strengthened CAFE provision. A similar provision never made it into energy legislation signed by President George H.W. Bush in 1992 -- a missed opportunity to move America toward energy independence.

Assuming Congress keeps stronger CAFE standards alive, another President Bush will have a chance to make energy policy that's smart for the United States and good for the planet.

Auer is a professor of public and environmental affairs at Indiana University.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, July 15, 2007:](#)

Respect nature and the community

I liked George Skelton's commentary "More people make state more expensive <<http://www.modbee.com/opinion/national/story/13748258p-14331756c.html>>" (July 2, Page B-7). The problem will always be who will pay to thin the woods, or who will pay for the creation of a new city or a developing city. An important San Joaquin Valley problem is who pays for the air quality that chokes the people with lung problems.

These problems could have been solved years ago, but greed always overrides rational laws. So nature, as the great novelist Jack London would attest, may sometimes bite us back, as it did in the Tahoe fire.

James T. Kunisch, Modesto

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, July 16, 2007:](#)

Farm bill faces clean air fight California delegation will need to pool its efforts.

Farming can be messy work. Some of that mess gets kicked up into San Joaquin Valley skies, contributing to the nation's most polluted air. Farming isn't the worst offender, creating only about 25% of the pollution -- trucks, cars, trains and suburban fireplaces create most of the rest. But farming contributes.

Fortunately, farmers and their friends in Congress are in a good position to do something about our lousy air. Unfortunately, it's going to take a fight.

Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, is proposing changes in the 2007 Farm Bill that would provide \$305 million over five years for programs in areas that have lots of farming and very bad air. The San Joaquin Valley is at the top of that list. House Resolution 1600 is his "marker" bill laying out his ideas so they can be incorporated into the larger bill.

About 100 legislators are co-sponsors, including Jim Costa, D-Fresno, and George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, and most of the Valley's contingent. But not everyone agrees that money to improve the air in farm communities is a good idea -- at least not if the money comes from the pockets of Midwestern farmers.

The House Agriculture Committee is packed with members from states whose farmers get direct payments for growing wheat, corn, soybeans, rice, sugar and cotton. Most farmers around here grow crops that get no subsidies -- almonds, grapes, pistachios; a cornucopia too huge to list.

But Valley farmers are saddled with the world's most restrictive and costly environmental requirements. They already have reduced airborne dust and soot, reduced carbon emissions and captured methane. Expanding such efforts will take money -- which brings us to the 2007 Farm Bill.

"Basically [the proposals] allow farmers in high-cost areas like ours to comply with federal mandates on the environment, pesticide applications and air quality issues," said Cardoza. "It allows them to stay in business."

Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., who chairs the Ag Committee, insists on a status quo Farm Bill -- continued big payments to farmers more comfortable sitting in a boardroom than on top of a tractor. He wants Cardoza's proposal to be passed separately.

But a separate measure wouldn't have any money attached; thus, under the Democrats' new pay-as-you-go requirements, it would be meaningless.

The Senate has two versions of the bill and the Bush administration has proposed its own, including some of what Cardoza is demanding. A competing House bill largely does away with subsidies.

Tuesday, the House Agriculture Committee begins "marking up" the Farm Bill. Committee members will review and amend the 650-page bill, but it's unlikely any real reform will make it out of ag committee.

To get his way, Cardoza is willing to play hardball. And he's standing on the pitcher's mound.

Last year, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi offered Cardoza a seat on the powerful House Rules Committee. He accepted, but only if he could stay on the Agriculture Committee, too. Once the Farm Bill leaves the Ag Committee (with or without Cardoza's proposals), it goes to the Rules Committee. The bill can be changed in Rules; but more importantly, the committee determines which amendments can be debated before the full House.

When it gets to the House floor, Cardoza and Costa are going to need all their political skills. They're also going to need the help of every member of the California delegation.

Those who operate cars, trucks and trains bear more responsibility than do farmers for creating this devil's soup of foul air. They can't be let off the hook. Farmers, at least, are willing to do their share; they deserve all the help they can get.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, July 16, 2007:](#)

Politics aside, what about real air issues?

What happens if Mary Nichols can't, or won't, do the job as chair of the California Air Resources Board? That's the question Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger needs to ask as he ponders the chessboard of his political future.

The Legislature, meanwhile, must be willing to ask hard questions during her confirmation process. Just being a Democrat shouldn't give her a free pass.

The governor caused a political dust storm in June when he fired CARB chair Robert Sawyer, saying it was because CARB wasn't moving fast enough to meet federal standards for the amount of ozone in the Valley's air.

Ozone is an essential ingredient in smog, and we have too much of it. Activists want the state to meet federal standards by 2018. The air board opted to follow the recommendation of the regional agency for a 2024 deadline.

That led to Sawyer's firing and the resignation of executive director Catherine Witherspoon two days later. Their very public disgruntlement caused a furor and it appeared that a Hummer had run into the governor's vaunted green credentials. So Schwarzenegger hired the widely admired Nichols to restore his green credibility. That move might work.

But what about the real problem -- making Valley air safer to breathe sooner rather than later?

When asked if she would try to meet the 2018 deadline, Nichols demurred: "When I spoke with the governor, he raised this question with me." Then she explained, "I actually had an opportunity to brief him on the provisions of the Clean Air Act ... which makes it difficult for CARB to do anything."

A longer deadline, she said, would give the state more time to find solutions. Besides, "I don't think even if California wanted to reconsider, we would be allowed to do so."

But the air board has not yet submitted its plan. Until it does, everything is on the table -- including the ozone deadline.

Our governor likes to discuss difficult issues in the fragrant haze of his smoking tent. Perhaps if Nichols and members of the air board were to join him in the tent he could help them see the necessity of moving more quickly. Unless, of course, his environmental credentials really are no more substantial than clouds of cigar smoke.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, July 15, 2007:](#)

Our new flood danger -- population growth Valley must prepare now for a rapid rise in numbers.

The Valley is already growing rapidly, and now comes word we can expect the population to more than double by 2050. That may seem like a long way off, but if we don't start getting ready for that boom now, we're going to face perhaps insurmountable problems when it hits.

By the numbers, according to the state Department of Finance:

Nearly 2 million people will call Fresno County home and Tulare County is projected to pass the 1 million mark.

Overall, the region's population will grow from 3.9 million to 9.4 million by 2050, which is almost as many people as live in Los Angeles County today.

Five of the Valley's eight counties will pass the 1 million mark, led by Kern County with 2.1 million people and Fresno County with 1.9 million.

The growth in the Valley, as in the state, will be fueled largely by immigration and a high birth rate among immigrants. It will create some daunting challenges. Here's a short agenda:

Health care

By 2020, the Valley will be short by as many as 20,000 nurses, and we already have a shortage of hospital beds.

The Valley also has the lowest ratio of doctors of any region in the state: 173 per 100,000 residents. Statewide, there are 302 doctors per 100,000 people. It's even worse for medical specialists. The Valley has just 43 specialists per 100,000 people, according to a Central Valley Health Policy Institute study. The statewide rate is 87 specialists per 100,000 population.

That means the effort to create a medical school at the University of California's Merced campus isn't just a good idea -- it's absolutely imperative.

Transportation

The state's voters approved \$1 billion for improvements to Highway 99, the Valley's main artery, back in November. That was good news -- but it's only about one-fourth of the money needed just to make Highway 99 adequate for today's traffic. It will be much worse if traffic in the Valley doubles -- or more -- with the rising population.

That puts even more pressure on the states' leaders to build the proposed high-speed rail system and begin funding other alternative transportation means right now.

Air quality

The Valley's air is getting better, but more people moving in means we could lose all the ground we've gained in recent years -- and then some -- if we don't prepare now. We must plan and build our urban centers in a much denser fashion, to reduce the need for vehicle traffic. Cities such as Fresno that have committed to reining in sprawl and growing up rather than out must keep to those commitments. They can't allow hodge-podge and leap-frog developments to remain the order of the day.

And the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District must be much more aggressive about cleaning the air, and much less devoted to the interests of those who profit from the status quo.

Water supplies and quality

We must build new surface storage capacity, take advantage of underground water banking opportunities and embrace aggressive new conservation techniques. Fresno and other cities without water meters must move more rapidly to install and use them.

Housing

How will we build housing that an increasingly young and often poor population can afford? The continued sprawl of single-family residences into the fertile fields of the Valley isn't the answer -- less than half of households can afford that version of the American Dream today, and it's likely that will only get worse.

For the first quarter of 2007, the affordability index for the Valley stood at 41% -- the percentage of median-income households that can afford a median-priced home in the region. That's up from 38% in the same quarter in 2006, but a population boom is likely to drive prices even higher, pushing more and more prospective homeowners out of the market.

Jobs

Unemployment rates in the central San Joaquin Valley hover between 8% and 9%, well above the state rate of 5.2% (measured in May). Efforts such as the Regional Jobs Initiative, which aims to create as many as 30,000 jobs over five years, are essential -- but are not enough by themselves. Diversification is necessary in any ag-based economy, since such economies tend to be characterized by low wages and high unemployment, and are also subject to vagaries of weather and markets.

Schools

Our schools are already being battered by thousands of children who don't speak English and come from homes that offer them little support in their school work. Add to that the skewed curriculum forced on students and teachers alike by standardized testing, and you have a recipe for today's underwhelming performance.

The population boom that lies in our near future will only exacerbate those problems, since it will be a very young group in the aggregate. We must find ways to get past the politics of education and get back to doing a better job of learning. These young people will be especially important as baby boomers age and leave the working population.

Recreation

As urban densities inevitably increase, so do all manner of pressures. That makes open space and recreational opportunities even more important -- and we're already way behind the curve. Fresno needs at least one more major regional park, along the lines of Woodward and Roeding, and many more smaller, neighborhood parks. Green, tree-lined open spaces are one of the principal amenities in cities that offer a high quality of life to residents, and we don't have enough now. It will only get worse as our population grows.

None of this will be easy, but getting a start on these crucial needs now will save us a great deal of grief as the Valley continues to fill with newcomers in the years ahead.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, July 15, 2007:](#)

City's Growth

The Californian recently invited members of the Opinion section's Sounding Board to weigh in on metropolitan Bakersfield's growth and ongoing City of Bakersfield and Kern County efforts to update the area's general plan.

Planning. Just about everyone agrees that we need to do it. Figures from the Bakersfield Planning Department are dramatic. Recently, metropolitan Bakersfield has been growing by 14,000 new people and three square miles per year. Since 2002, 17,000 single-family building permits were issued and the population increased by 24 percent. Current population projections are half a million by 2020 and a million by 2040.

That's a lot of change. To deal with it, the city and county planning departments are embarking on an update to the Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan. Those agencies, along with the Kern Council of Governments, recently asked Bakersfield Vision 2020 to conduct community forums, just as it did eight years ago when the Vision 2020 project was initiated.

As a facilitator/recorder during two of those four sessions, I was struck by the insights, creativity and high regard for our community expressed by the participants. Even when critical and there were some candid comments made people were constructive and supportive.

Not all of the comments have been compiled, so I can only cite some examples of the ideas and solutions that came out of the first two meetings.

On the positive side, the people I heard see Bakersfield as a warm and friendly place with a convenient location in the state, good educational opportunities and relatively affordable real estate. Of the problems mentioned, the ones that stood out for me were sprawl and the resulting need for good planning, increasing traffic congestion and [poor air quality](#).

There were a lot of solutions offered. Some examples: incentives for infill development, walkable neighborhoods, more mixed use projects, revitalization of downtown, encouragement of urban renewal, consideration of cumulative impact in making planning decisions, better public transportation, becoming a "self-help" area for road funding, tree planting, car pooling and "green" construction.

One participant had the creative if impractical idea of knocking down the mountains and installing large fans to pump our air pollution to the coast.

It appeared to me that most participants wanted what I would call "intelligent planning." What's that? It means the kind of things cited in the sessions, as well as consideration by planners and developers of the total community, including such factors as respect for our environment and preservation of the natural beauty of our area as we develop it.

I think intelligent planning also should consider the cumulative impact of development, an issue cited in the group sessions but often seemingly overlooked. This would result in a planning process that takes into consideration not only property owner rights, but also the community and environment that makes those rights valuable in the first place. The recently enacted Hillside Ordinance is an example of a step in the right direction. I hope it won't be watered down in practice.

In our sessions, the participants, in effect, called for planning that is more than words in documents. They want planning that makes a difference and is implemented in terms of building a community that is the kind of place where people will want to live and do business.

Vision 2020 has done and is doing a superb job in defining that kind of community, but its work and the planning documents which will arise from the current process ultimately are only as good as the willingness of our leadership and population to support their recommendations and mandates in practice.

As a friend pointed out recently, there are considerable pressures on planners to approve projects. To quote him, "When it becomes difficult, the planners should dig in to protect the people... ."

It is those tough, day-to-day decisions that will make the difference in our community's future. Let's make the right ones.

Robert D. Allison of Bakersfield is a retired administrator and chemistry professor at Bakersfield College.

[Fresno Bee opinion blog, Sunday, July 15, 2007:](#)

Got complaints? These are the people you should tell

By Jim Boren / The Fresno Bee

Two recent news stories involving the California Legislature tell us a lot about the selfishness of the state's political leadership.

One was about legislative staff members lining up at the state Capitol to get interest-free loans because their bosses didn't pass a state budget on time. The other story was about state senators manipulating the legislative schedule to get their \$162-per-day expense payments over the Fourth of July recess.

The legislators then went back to their districts and told their constituents how much they've accomplished in Sacramento. At least they are working together. This was a bipartisan scam. Both the Democrats and Republicans are ripping off the taxpayers while not doing their jobs.

But we deserve it because we're enablers. Californians don't pay attention to their legislators ducking their duties, and that only encourages them. They get away with not passing a budget on time, and then they make sure they get their expense payments even when they don't deserve them.

This isn't just a complaint about lazy politicians taking advantage of the system. The inadequacy of the Legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in solving the state's biggest problems is felt daily by Californians in a diminished quality of life.

This time I'm naming names

Every public institution is strained, and the folks leading us find reasons not to act. Can anyone look at our public schools, our transportation system, our criminal justice system, health care or our air quality and say that they are happy with the direction the state is going?

The last time I criticized government officials, a reader complained that I lumped them all together, essentially letting them off the hook because I didn't name names. You can't write to a "bunch of politicians" to complain about their performance, he said.

He's right, so here are the people you should complain to about California no longer being the Golden State:

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Assembly Speaker Fabián Núñez of Los Angeles, Assembly Minority Leader Mike Villines of Clovis, Senate Pro Tem Don Perata of Oakland, Senate Minority Leader Dick Ackerman of Irvine.

They are referred to as "The Big Five" in state government.

If anyone is responsible for gridlock, it's these five. Write to them, and tell them you aren't happy. The interesting thing is they think they are doing a good job. Give them a taste of reality.

This is a sample letter I would suggest sending:

Dear Big Five Member:

As a California resident concerned about the lack of action on the state's most serious problems, I'm asking you to put aside your coziness with special interests and your loyalty to your political party.

The problems in this state are not Democratic problems or Republican problems. They are problems that citizens must deal with every day, and things don't seem to be getting better in California.

Our public schools are crowded, our children aren't performing well and their teachers complain about spending more time testing than teaching.

When I drive to Los Angeles, the freeways are like parking lots and they are so beat up that I'm sure I will need an alignment on my car when I finally get there.

My children have asthma, and it is especially bad during the summer. The Valley air district just delayed cleaning up our air for another decade. My children will be adults before government helps them breathe clean air.

My daughter had an asthma attack and we went to the emergency room. We sat there for hours behind dozens of others needing medical attention. The nurse said it was because the state won't solve the health-care crisis.

A police officer told me that prison overcrowding will force the state to release felons back into my neighborhood because the Legislature won't deal with the prison crisis.

The parks we used to go to aren't being maintained anymore. I was told it's because government has to make cuts to pay for the pension increases and other goodies you've given public employee unions.

Then I hear you folks figured out how to get your expense checks even when you're on holiday. I don't have an expense account and the two jobs I'm working at barely pay all my bills.

I wish you were in my shoes just once. Then maybe you'd see how playing politician does not help those of us who actually must deal with the problems you ignore.

I have to go back to work now. Thanks for listening.

Sincerely, Your loyal constituent.

I couldn't have said it better myself.

[Editorial in the Orange County Register, July 15, 2007:](#)

The ethanol fleet that wasn't

The state spent \$17 million on 'green' vehicles - and then ran them on dirty old gasoline.

It's the same old story out of Sacramento. Lots of posturing. Not much to show for it. Thanks to fine reporting by the San Jose Mercury News, we learn Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration for two years has "invested" more than \$17 million in a fleet of cars and trucks to be environmentally friendly, but that the 1,138 state vehicles have traveled a combined 10 million miles, burning more than 413,202 gallons of gas - without using a drop of the ethanol they were intended to run on. Oops.

Because the vehicles have used regular gasoline, the so-called "flex-fuel" fleet produced even more pollution than would have been created with conventional gas-burning cars and trucks, according to the Mercury News.

The problem is there are no ethanol pumping stations to fill tanks with the supposedly more environmentally friendly mixture of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline. Reportedly, there is one public E85 ethanol mix station in San Diego, but no state vehicle has ever filled up there.

On top of that, the Mercury News reports, over 15,000 miles the state's "flex-fuel" mid-sized Chevy Impala creates 8.3 tons of greenhouse gases compared to 7.3 tons from the smaller, petroleum-fueled Ford Focus that it replaced.

"The governor loves to take the time to pose and talk about the greening of California, but very little gets done in terms of doing the hard work," Democrat Sen. Dean Florez, chairman of the Government Organization Committee, told the Mercury News.

The net effect may have been worse for the environment had ethanol pumps been available. Ethanol made from Midwest corn would have to be hauled to California in tankers or trains - it can't be piped - creating pollution along the way. According to the Competitive Enterprise Institute, ethanol also is more costly to produce. American taxpayers pay twice - in farmers' crop subsidies and in a 51-cent-per-gallon tax subsidy.

The claim that ethanol is clean fuel also is dubious, considering in 1992 it nearly was outlawed by new clean air laws. Ethanol does reduce carbon monoxide emissions, but when it comes to hydrocarbons, it appears to make things worse, CEI reports. Some scientists say making ethanol uses more energy than it yields, while others look at cropland used, water consumed and other production factors to conclude ethanol is a net minus, ecologically speaking.

As if all this weren't discouraging enough, it's not the first time the state has been down this dead end road to greenness. In 1981 the state bought cars that ran exclusively on M85, a blend of 85 percent methane and 15 percent gasoline. There were no M85 pumps then, either. When the private sector chose not to open methane pumping stations, the state "invested" in 50 pumps, but ultimately abandoned the effort. The fleet ran on nothing but gas.

Paying attention to man's impact on the environment is a good idea. Voluntary conservation too. But playing on environmental sympathies to invoke government mandates and pump up political careers doesn't help either the environment or the people paying the bill.

Two state Senate committees have called for hearings in August on why the current ethanol fleet was purchased but driven on gasoline. We suspect they will conclude it was a mistake. They may also find there's been a lot of posturing, and not much to show for it, except for the \$17 million cost to taxpayers.

[Editorial in the Orange County Register, July 15, 2007](#)

Car-fool lanes

Surprise! State's social-engineering highway scheme has not met federal hopes and dreams.

California traffic is the worst. In fairness, it's just as bad in Minnesota, New Jersey and North Carolina, according to the Reason Foundation's annual state highway-system report.

"[The nation wastes]an estimated \$63 billion annually in time and fuel while sitting in traffic," the study says.

There's worse to come. California's 37.4 million residents will increase by 500,000 a year for 30 years, the state projects. Ever-rising housing costs increasingly prompt people to locate farther from work, imposing ever-longer commutes.

Government's solution is to dictate. But car-pool lanes intended to reduce pollution and relieve congestion haven't persuaded more solo drivers to share rides, and even have increased traffic in adjoining lanes, says Pravin Varaiya, UC professor and author of the study, "HOV lanes increase overall congestion."

It's counter-intuitive to imagine relieving congestion by restricting the number of cars in one of several lanes of traffic. Nevertheless, the federal government is miffed that California car-pool lanes are getting crowded, and moving slowly. The Federal Highway Administration says when the state's 1,380 miles of car-pool lanes don't maintain a 45-mph minimum speed 90 percent of the time during rush hours six months a year, they don't comply with federal strings attached to funding.

The government solution is to restrict supply by manipulating motorists, favoring some, such as those who share rides or those who buy hybrid cars, and penalizing others with more congested regular lanes and 49,500 annual traffic citations at \$376 a pop for solo drivers so audacious as to use car-pool lanes.

The proper solution, we believe, isn't to further restrict access, but to meet rising demand by opening car-pool lanes to all vehicles, and building more lanes and even toll roads.

If people want to car-pool for convenience or to save money, more power to them. But the government's carrot-and-stick doesn't work, and it restricts freedom of choice, which drives supply and demand.