

Use of fireplaces discouraged today

Modesto Bee, Thursday, January 25, 2007

People in Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties are asked to refrain from using fireplaces and older wood stoves today because of concerns about air quality. Forecasters say the air will be unhealthy for sensitive people — children, older adults and those with chronic breathing problems. The "burning discouraged" advisory comes from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The next step is a ban on burning.

On the Net: www.valleyair.org

Valley to receive \$2.5m to seed

Partnership will offer grants to businesses that achieve a goal.

By Jeff St. John / The Fresno Bee

Thursday, Jan. 25, 2007

After spending the past year and a half studying ways to solve a host of economic, environmental and societal problems in the San Joaquin Valley, a partnership formed by Gov. Schwarzenegger is getting ready to spend \$2.5 million on seeding the region for future success.

The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley has opened the door to groups seeking state-funded "seed grants" of up to \$250,000 each to help meet the partnership's lengthy list of goals for the region.

The grants are among the first direct financial contributions to flow from the partnership, a 26-member group of government, nonprofit and private leaders formed by executive order in June 2005 to focus attention on the Valley's needs.

With grant applications coming from dozens of government and nonprofit groups and coalitions, seeking to address problems from the region's dearth of low-income housing to building venture capital resources for Valley entrepreneurs, the partnership will have plenty to choose from, said Ashley Swearengin, lead executive for the partnership.

"We are attracting additional resources to this area," Swearengin said of the seed grants, which are expected to be awarded this summer and to extend through the end of 2008. Swearengin is director of the Office of Community and Economic Development at California State University, Fresno, which is serving as a coordinator for the partnership.

Among those seeking grants are the city of Fresno, the Council of Fresno County Governments, the Fresno Chamber of Commerce, the Regional Jobs Initiative, Fresno State and a proposed "clean energy office" for the region, she said.

Proposals include a new fund for development in downtown Fresno and an increase in tourism promotion for the San Joaquin Valley. Others include studying ways to preserve agricultural land, improve education and build support for more low-income housing.

Finalists for grants will be selected this spring based on how closely their proposals match goals the partnership set forth in the "strategic action plan" it published in November, Swearengin added. That plan was based on comments collected during a year and a half of meetings throughout the eight-county region the partnership covers.

One example is the "San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Office" being proposed by a consortium including the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the Kings River Conservation District and the Valley Clean Air Now group. The partnership called for such an office to oversee efforts to improve energy efficiency, develop alternative energy businesses and lead the Valley toward "energy self-sufficiency."

"I think this is a real opportunity to demonstrate how clean energy helps solve some really tough challenges in the Valley," said Paul Johnson, an energy expert consulting on the project. With a \$250,000 grant, the group would form the clean energy office, put together a database of resources for clean energy development and provide technical assistance for local governments, the region's agriculture industry and others, he said.

Given that the San Joaquin Valley is expected to need 3,500 megawatts of additional power over the next 20 years, increasing clean energy's share of the burden could spur economic development, increase employment, reduce air pollution and help shape future growth in more sustainable ways, Johnson said.

At least two other proposals are aimed at tackling the partnership's goal of fostering new and innovative businesses in the San Joaquin Valley.

One proposal to expand training and support services for startup businesses is a partnership of Fresno State's Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the Clovis-based Central Valley Business Incubator and the San Francisco-based venture capital group Pacific Community Ventures.

"We're trying to bring the academic arm, the incubation arm and the money arm into a collaborative that is going to work throughout the Valley," said Tim Stearns, director of the Lyles Center. The partners are seeking \$250,000 to pay for training at regional community colleges, help establish business incubators in cities throughout the region and pay for venture capital experts to teach Central Valley workshops, he said.

Another proposal would link the Lyles Center to the Chino-based Golden Capital Network, which is seeking to include the Fresno, Modesto and Stockton areas in a new "hub-and-spokes" investment network linking wealthy "angel investors" in 10 regions throughout California and Nevada to businesses looking for seed money.

Golden Capital Network is seeking a \$100,000 grant to identify "business champions," who will organize investment funds in those 10 regions, said Jon Gregory, the network's president and chief executive. The eventual goal of the project is to raise \$25 million in investment capital that can be directed to businesses throughout the regions the network covers, he said.

At the Regional Jobs Initiative, a mostly volunteer effort to increase the number of high-paying jobs in the Central Valley, a group of software developers is also seeking a grant, said Ian Duffield, chairman of RJI's software development cluster.

The group is seeking \$250,000 to expand its services, which include a soon-to-be-launched Web site linking software developers and other businesses, to include companies and communities across the San Joaquin Valley, he said.

"The goal would be to get software companies across the Valley more coordinated," Duffield said.

Valley below average in key needs, survey finds

By Russell Clemings / The Fresno Bee
Thursday, Jan. 25, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley is doing a poor-to-middling job at meeting important needs in environmental quality, education and the economy.

At least that's the collective opinion of almost 200 people who attended a recent public meeting on the state-funded San Joaquin Valley Blueprint process.

Results of the poll were presented Wednesday to a committee overseeing the blueprint effort, aimed at forging consensus on what the Valley should look like in 2050.

Barbara Steck, senior transportation planner for the Council of Fresno County Governments, said the poll and other survey results collected in recent months will provide planners with guidance in drawing up alternative visions of the Valley's future.

Those visions — complete with multicolored maps showing results of various land-use scenarios — are scheduled to be presented for public feedback later this year. For now, the committee has approved a ranked list of 10 priorities to be used in developing Fresno County's share of the eight-county blueprint. At the top of the list are the environment, economy, public safety and education.

The poll, taken at the public meeting Jan. 11, asked respondents to rank those and other values, but also to gauge how well the Valley was doing in meeting those values.

Respondents said public safety is important, but was being achieved at a level better than average, between "just getting by" and "good." Respondents had a choice of answers ranging from "not at all" to "very well."

The verdict was harsher for "world class education," "transportation options," "vibrant economy" and two values relating to the environment. Each of those was ranked important, but the region's performance was ranked between "poor" and "just getting by."

Five other values — "aesthetic quality," "all people have worth," "housing choices," "cultural richness" and "positive image" — ranked as less important.

Consultant Georgiena Vivian told the committee the poll's findings matched previous surveys and a similar poll this week at a public meeting in Oakhurst. Now it will be up to planners in the eight Valley counties to make the vision match the values.

S.J. Supervisors vote to back bio-lab

By John Upton - San Joaquin News Service

Lodi News Sentinel, Wednesday, January 24, 2007

Acting on the advice of its agricultural committee, the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 on Tuesday to support an anti-biological terrorism laboratory that could be built southwest of Tracy to research incurable fatal diseases that affect both animals and people.

Chairman of the county's Agricultural Advisory Board, Joe Petersen, told the supervisors the bio-lab would bring high-tech jobs to the area and lessen the time taken to test local livestock for exotic diseases.

Petersen said the agricultural board voted unanimously to ask the supervisors to support the project while it is further investigated.

Petersen said the board met with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, which has bid for the Department of Homeland Security lab, but said the board had not spoken to opponents of the bio-lab. He said he was familiar with the opponents' arguments through newspaper articles.

County Agricultural Commissioner Scott Hudson said the board had not traveled to Site 300 or to Tracy to research the project, but said they had spoken with people who live near Site 300 over the phone.

Lawrence Livermore's food and agricultural program leader Pam Hullinger told the supervisors that the proposed laboratory would be the only one in the nation to study two diseases that affect livestock.

Supervisor Victor Mow said he had heard from the agricultural community that the bio-lab would help create jobs, but he said the nonagricultural business community had been "totally silent" about the project's potential to create jobs.

Supervisor Leroy Ornellas, who represents Tracy, said he was worried about how experiments would be affected by outdoor test explosions at Site 300, particularly since a permit was recently issued to increase the size of explosions there.

Ornellas thanked the advisory board for its recommendations, which he had requested, but said the recommendations were focused on agriculture and did not consider human health risks.

Ornellas moved to strike out language in the resolution that said the supervisors believe the research activities will "help safeguard and support the general public," but Supervisor Larry Ruhstaller successfully argued against changing the language.

Superintendent Steven Gutierrez voted against his colleagues, saying it was too early to determine whether the research activities would help safeguard and support the general public.

"What research activity?" Gutierrez said. "You don't know what they're going to do."

The Department of Homeland Security and Lawrence Livermore are yet to announce what types of diseases will be studied at the bio-lab, how the pathogens will be shipped in and out of the bio-lab, or whether accidents will be publicly reported. The Department of Homeland Security will tour all 14 sites before June, including Site 300, being considered for the bio-lab, according to information presented during the meeting by Lawrence Livermore.

Chairman Victor Mow said as he voted yes that "we would like to send the strongest proposal we can, and the strongest proposal we can (send) is that we have all the cities in our community behind it."

"Hopefully we don't have a city within our county opposing it," Mow said.

The Tracy City Council is expected to vote on whether or not it supports the bio-lab proposal at its next meeting Feb. 6. Site 300 straddles San Joaquin and Alameda counties, and its border is a mile outside Tracy's city limits.

Lawrence Livermore is managed by the University of California. The university's agricultural division's government and external relations director, Steve Nation, said after the meeting that the agricultural industry strongly supported the proposed bio-lab. He said the California Farm Bureau, the California Cattlemen's Association, a woolgrowers association, and Foster Farms support the bio-lab.

Activist Bob Sarvey spoke against the proposal during the meeting, holding some of the petitions he said were signed by "thousands" of people who oppose the bio-lab. The Tracy Press reviewed some the petitions and counted at least 150 signatures from Tracy residents.

Capital heads for a record low rainfall

By Edie Lau - Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, January 25, 2007

One look at Brad Gay's brown potted plumeria tells the story of Sacramento weather, January 2007.

"A lot of the leaves are just toast right now," said Gay ruefully, recalling summer days when his yard is perfumed by tropical plants.

Weeks of unusually cold and clear weather have brought the city to the verge of a record: driest January in more than 100 years.

Only 0.07 inches of rain have fallen this month in downtown Sacramento, just a teardrop of the normal 4.18 inches for the month. Record low rainfall for the month is 0.15 inches, set in 1889.

"Our record is in serious jeopardy," said Jim Mathews, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Sacramento office.

Only the slightest chance of rain is in the forecast for the next six days. Mathews said a storm brewing 300 to 400 miles off the Pacific coast is "bumping into this atmospheric road block -- the (high pressure) ridge over us -- and weakening significantly."

In other words, it might rain a little this weekend but probably won't.

What gives?

Weather scientists say the jet stream that normally delivers winter moisture to California is taking a big detour. Its path has meant drenching rain and snow for Washington and Oregon, and snowstorm after snowstorm after snowstorm in Colorado.

"It's been kind of a tale of two winters," said Scott Stephens, meteorologist at the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., noting that until recently, the eastern United States was experiencing spring-like winter.

"That's the way weather patterns shape up," Stephens said. "If one area of the country is experiencing exceptionally warm weather, oftentimes -- especially in winter -- the other part of the country will be getting cold weather."

In Colorado, ranchers still haven't been able to get feed to cattle, state Agriculture Commissioner John Stulp said. Some agriculture groups think the toll could reach 15,000 cattle once all carcasses are found.

In Sacramento, Mathews said that if the coming storm system doesn't pan out, nothing on the horizon hints of precipitation until after Groundhog Day, Feb. 2.

That's bad for snowpack.

The average water content in the state's snowpack was 59 percent of normal when last measured on Jan. 4. The next snow survey is Feb. 2 near Echo Summit off Highway 50. Results are almost certain to be worse, because the Sierra has seen virtually no new snow in the interim.

While January has been dry by any definition, state water watchers aren't using the other "d" word -- drought.

To see a drought, predicted runoff would have to be meager, and storage in the state's reservoirs would have to fall well below average, said state hydrologist Maurice Roos.

Thanks to last year's abundant rain and snowfall, that's not likely to happen this year.

As of Dec. 31, the state average reservoir storage was 119 percent of normal. Roos said he doesn't expect it to dip below 100 percent even after this exceptionally dry month, because water demand is low in January.

The story is different in private yards.

Brad Gay, the tropical-plant aficionado, runs a gardening service in Davis. Gay said he's been watering the lawns and landscapes of some clients, as well as in his own yard, to make up the deficit.

Judy McClure, coordinator of the UC Cooperative Extension master gardener program, cautioned against watering grass willy-nilly.

"We definitely don't want them to water the lawn unless they happen to live along the river where the soils are a lot looser," McClure said. "The majority of areas in Sacramento have soils that are heavy in clay, and the clay tends to maintain moisture for a long time."

Too much water, and grass is subject to root rot, she said.

McClure and other gardening experts recommended digging 4 to 8 inches into the soil to test the moisture at root depth.

"If it makes a dirt clod, that's ideal soil moisture level," said Fred Hoffman, a master gardener who lives in Herald and maintains a Web site on gardening (www.farmerfred.com). "If, on the other hand, you're pulling up dry dust, definitely water."

Plants likely to need a drink of water, Hoffman and McClure said, are those in pots and raised beds.

"A lot of people are panicky about their plants right now -- they're not looking good," Hoffman said.

He said withered and brown outer leaves should be left intact for now to help protect against future frosts.

Another consequence of scarce winter storms is dirty air.

Today is another Spare the Air day in Sacramento, the eighth of the winter season. The stagnant conditions promote build-up of particulate pollution that comes in large part from traffic and wood-burning.

On the bright side: The lack of moisture and clouds has brought a succession of sunny days to a region typically wrapped in fog this time of year.

Bay Area to get 3 free days of transit

Spare the Air program will return in summer, but commissioners seek more continued ridership to help lower pollution

By Kiley Russell

CONTRA COSTA TIMES, Thursday, January 25, 2007

The Bay Area will be treated to three free days of public transportation this year during the region's smoggiest summer months.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission voted unanimously and without discussion Wednesday to spend \$7.5 million on the "Spare the Air" free transit program despite concerns about its effectiveness and cost.

Last year, the commission spent \$13.2 million for six days of free transit during the most polluted commute days. The goal is to reduce traffic congestion and smog on days the Bay Area seems likely to exceed air quality standards.

Wednesday's decision to continue the free rides on 26 of the region's transit systems was contingent on an evaluation of last year's program.

That analysis shows it cost nearly \$411,000 per ton to reduce vehicle emissions and points out that the Bay Area avoided violating the ozone pollution standard on just two of the six free transit days.

Still, without the program "air quality conditions could have been much worse," according to the report.

The program is popular with the commission, which is composed of elected officials from all nine Bay Area counties, but some worry that it simply costs too much for the benefits it produces.

"With that outlay of money, which is pretty hefty, we ought to try to see if (the money) can be combined with some incentive to get people to use transit at least once or twice a week," said Sue Lempert, who represents San Mateo County's cities on the commission. "So we get more bang for the buck."

"The last time, I think a lot of people rode transit for fun."

During last year's six days of free transit, ridership increased 15 percent, or by about 1.35 million riders. That led to nearly 529,000 fewer car trips and 3.5 million fewer miles of automobile travel for every free transit day.

The gains were short-lived. Ridership increased 3 percent on two Spare the Air days without free transit, and just 1 percent on the last Spare the Air day of the season.

The free rides also caused some consternation. Regular BART riders endured crowds of unruly youths and ferry lines were overcrowded and delayed.

"One of the things that happened with the ferries ... was that people went into the city from Marin and Alameda counties ... then they all wanted to leave at the same time with the commuters," said commission spokesman John Goodwin.

"That was unforeseen," he said. "We've got to come up with a way to address that."

BART is suggesting six days of free transit, but only during the morning commute.

"It would be less than the cost of three full days, save the environment, save money, save the reputation of the Spare the Air program," said BART spokesman Linton Johnson. "And it would put the program front and center for a longer time."

The commission still must work out the details of this year's program and has vowed to find ways to minimize problems and reduce costs, possibly by enlisting corporate sponsors.

"I think we're certainly inching there," Lempert said. "It's certainly a lot easier to say, 'Let's have free rides on bad, hot days.' The other stuff takes more time and is more difficult to accomplish, but I think we need to be headed in that direction."

'Spare the Air' program gets the green light

Commission to put \$7.5 million toward free transit despite concerns about program's effectiveness

By Kiley Russell, MEDIANEWS STAFF
Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, January 25, 2007

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LA-area air regulators sue state commission over LNG standard

The Associated Press

In the Los Angeles Times and Washington Post, Thursday, January 24, 2007.

Also in the Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, January 24, 2007, 3:38 P.M.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District sued state public utilities officials, claiming the liquefied natural gas that officials approved for use in California could worsen air pollution.

Energy providers could spend as much as \$3 billion if seven natural gas terminals are built on the coast of California and in Baja California, Mexico. The air-quality agency alleges that natural gas could set back progress toward clean air. The lawsuits were filed with the California appeals court and the state Supreme Court.

The California Public Utilities Commission has approved a standard that will allow oil companies and other energy providers to burn the gas to generate power. Because imported liquefied natural gas burns hotter than domestic gas, it creates more pollution.

The South Coast AQMD works to control air pollution in much of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties and all of Orange County.

Sam Atwood, a district spokesman, said the imported fuel won't increase pollution if it is mixed with an inert gas such as hydrogen, which some cities on the East Coast are already doing. Public Utilities Commission President Michael R. Peevey said pollution would not increase under the standard approved in September.

Meanwhile, on Monday, harbor commissioners in Long Beach voted to end a review of a proposed natural gas terminal there. Commissioners said they based their decision in part on an assessment by Long Beach City Attorney Robert Shannon, who concluded that an environmental impact report on the project was legally inadequate.

As a result of the decision, the commission surmised that a deal between the city and the firm behind the project, Sound Energy Solutions, was not likely to happen.

Sound Energy Solutions had offered the city \$500 million over 40 years in franchise and wharf fees, property taxes, user fees and other funds.

California officials say Bush energy plan could raise emissions

By SAMANTHA YOUNG

Bakersfield Californian Wednesday, Jan 24, 2007

The Bush administration's new energy plan to reduce gasoline demand by 20 percent could have an unintended side effect.

Linda Adams, California's Environmental Protection Agency secretary, says it could increase greenhouse gas emissions.

It's the latest shot at the Bush administration by the governor and his administration over global warming.

The president's outlined his plan yesterday in his state of the union address. He proposes to increase the amount of alternative fuel refiners must blend with gasoline over the next 10 years.

But California officials say the federal government's definition of alternative fuel encompasses ways that burn fossil fuels or turn coal into liquid. Such actions release the carbons that are blamed for global warming.

The White House did not immediately return a call today from The Associated Press seeking comment.

Warming to Raise Seas for 1, 000 Years: U.N. Draft

By REUTERS

In the N.Y. Times and the Washington Post, Thursday, Jan. 25, 2007

OSLO (Reuters) - World sea levels will keep rising for more than 1,000 years even if governments manage to slow a projected surge in temperatures this century blamed on greenhouse gases, a draft U.N. climate report says.

The study, by a panel of 2,500 scientists who advise the United Nations, also says that dust from volcanic eruptions and air pollution seems to have braked warming in recent decades by reflecting sunlight back into space, scientific sources said.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will publish its report, the most complete overview of climate change science, in Paris on February 2 after a final review. It will guide policy makers combating global warming.

The draft projects more droughts, rains, shrinking Arctic ice and glaciers and rising sea levels to 2100 and cautions that the effects of a build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will last far longer.

"Twenty-first century anthropogenic (human) carbon dioxide emissions will contribute to warming and sea level rise for more than a millennium, due to the timescales required for removal of this gas," the sources quoted the report as saying.

Still, the report has good news by quoting six models with central projections of sea level rises this century of between 28 and 43 cm (11 and 16.9 inches) -- compared to a far wider band of 9 to 88 cm (3.5 to 34.6 inches) in a 2001 report, they said.

Sea levels rose by 17 cm (6.7 inches) in the 20th century. Rising seas would threaten low-lying Pacific islands, coasts from Bangladesh to Florida and cities from Shanghai to Buenos Aires.

VERY LIKELY

The report says it is "very likely" -- or more than a 90 percent chance -- that human activities, led by burning fossil fuels, are to blame for warming since 1950.

The previous report in 2001 said the link was "likely," or at least 66 percent. Lingering uncertainties include whether higher temperatures will bring more clouds -- their white tops bounce heat back into space.

In New Delhi, IPCC chairman Rajendra Pachauri said he hoped the report would shock governments into action.

"I hope this report will shock people, governments into taking more serious action as you really can't get a more authentic and a more credible piece of scientific work," he told Reuters.

The draft projects temperatures will rise by 2 to 4.5 Celsius (3.6 to 8.1 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels with a "best estimate" of a 3C (5.4 F) rise, assuming carbon dioxide levels are stabilized at about 45 percent above current levels.

That is a narrower range than the 1.4-5.8C projected in the previous IPCC report in 2001, which did not say which end of the band was most likely. The European Union says any temperature rise above 2C will cause "dangerous" changes.

Stabilizing carbon dioxide levels would lead to a further temperature rise of about 0.5C (0.8F), mostly between 2100-2200, and push up sea levels by a further 30 to 80 cm (11 to 31 inches) by 2300 with decreasing rates in later centuries, it said.

It notes that sea levels were probably 4 to 6 meters (13 to 19-1/2 feet) higher when temperatures were 3C higher than the present in a period between Ice Ages 125,000 years ago.

The Gulf Stream, bringing warm waters to the North Atlantic, was likely to slow but not enough to offset an overall warming. And there was scant chance of an abrupt shutdown of the ocean current system by 2100.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, January 25, 2007](#)

Can Crows Landing project go green?

An excellent place to start addressing pollution would be leadership on one of the most important issues facing the San Joaquin Valley — the future of the former naval station at Crows Landing. This stands to benefit regional development, but could also add to our pollution woes. Various developers seek to establish a railroad connection for freight and passenger service between the Port of Oakland and the western side of Stanislaus County.

The use of a short-haul rail system could be an environmental plus because it would get high-polluting diesel trucks off major commute corridors while reducing farmers' costs for shipping their products to market. By creating tens of thousands of new jobs in Stanislaus County, commute times could be greatly reduced, potentially removing a number of polluting commuter cars from the road. Whatever form the Crows Landing development and others like it take, the best way forward is a realistic approach to balancing economic development with environmental quality. California should encourage innovative developments like Crows Landing — but only if these developments also recognize the need to clear the air.

PETER ASMUS - Stinson Beach

[Fresno Bee column, Thursday, Jan. 25, 2007:](#)

Will board make the grade? Stay tuned

By Bill McEwen / The Fresno Bee

If you're expecting a rant about the Fresno County Board of Supervisors padding its staff, you might be disappointed.

This is a big county. We have nearly 1 million people living in about 6,000 square miles. I believe the five supervisors when they say it's impossible for them and one aide apiece to keep up with things.

So, I have no problem with the board unanimously passing the No Supervisor Left Behind Act this week. With the vote, each supervisor gets to add an analyst at a salary of up to \$71,968 a year.

But those analysts should come with benchmarks. Taxpayers must have a way to measure what their money buys — improved services, more efficient government, or, perhaps, nothing at all. Who should determine whether this is money well spent?

Me.

With your help.

I need the help because it's tough keeping track of the mayor, supervisors, City Council and whether John Welty has sold the naming rights to every door, desk and chair at Fresno State.

How to rate the supervisors?

With a system everybody understands. A year from now, I'll give each supervisor a final grade ranging from "A" for excellence to "F" for failure.

Right now, they're on academic probation.

Sorry, Mr. Waterston. I'm kidding.

Some of you are thinking the grades won't be objective. You're right, but they won't be plucked from thin air, either.

An example: The board and the Fresno City Council will hear ideas for improving public safety from a committee studying consolidation on Feb. 1. If past performance means anything, supervisors will show up, praise consolidation — and do nothing.

That's unacceptable. I'll give every supervisor who stonewalls consolidation an "F" and post the grade on my blog at www.fresnobeehive.com, where readers can offer their own grades and comments.

Supervisors who try to get something done will receive passing marks. They will only earn an "A" by leading the way on a big accomplishment.

Other potential topics for grading: air quality, dairy regulation, preservation of prime ag land, jail crowding, mental health, graffiti, roadside dumping and retiree pensions.

Some supervisors will have their own special topics. Again, an example: board chairman Bob Waterston says he wants the county to operate "more like a business."

If the county does, he'll get a passing mark.

If it doesn't ... let's just say this is one report card the dog can't eat.

A smart business answers customer phone calls — something some supervisors admit they don't do as well as they should because they don't have enough help.

Soon, they'll have that help — and no more excuses for not answering constituent inquiries.

Let the grading begin. And please don't ask me to work up report cards for Mayor Alan Autry and the City Council.

I don't have an aide, much less an analyst, and I need to be ready in case Welty sells the naming rights to the university's toilet-paper dispensers to a tarot-card reader.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, Jan. 25, 2007:](#)

'Look down the road' to a more beautiful Valley

The recent forum on dairies at California State University, Fresno, was well-attended. Fresno County Supervisor Henry Perea was there and other government officials should have been. Basically, the question being asked is: "How many dairies is too many?"

Having heard the very fine presentation, what I would say to our local officials is: Our Valley is a beautiful place. Outside our cities are green fields, blooming orchards, rolling hills. Don't destroy this beauty.

Let's have the water healthy, the air clean and the beauty of the countryside fresh and unspoiled.

Protecting the future isn't easy; it requires vision and leadership. Everyday problems can cloud our vision.

Please, look beyond today -- look down the road with vision and leadership.

Lucile Wheaton, Fresno