

Senators want air board to reflect Valley's makeup

By Hank Shaw - Capitol Bureau Chief
Stockton Record, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007

SACRAMENTO - The Legislature soon will set about divvying up the largest chunk of air quality cash in a generation, and two of the Valley's leading Democrats want to secure up to \$300 million of it.

But there is a catch: The money could depend on passage of legislation that would make the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Board more reflective of the rapidly urbanizing Valley.

State Sens. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, and Michael Machado, D-Linden, want to expand the board to include permanent seats for large cities such as Stockton as well as two governor-appointed air-related professionals. Machado's version of the bill would add a respiratory doctor and an air quality scientist.

The lawmakers are linking a long-running local dispute with larger California politics. Who gets what whenever the Capitol distributes pots of cash - in this case \$1 billion in air quality money from the larger package of bonds voters approved last fall - almost always pits region against region.

And the San Joaquin Valley typically gets short shrift in these fights. Relatively poor, relatively small and relatively Republican in a largely Democratic and urban state, the Valley can rarely withstand moves by Southern California or the Bay Area to gobble up state resources.

Compounding this problem is the stark fact that the Valley's air quality has remained poor despite decades of effort, and the regional air board has borne the brunt of the blame. Critics say it favors rural, agricultural interests over both the environment and the poor forced to breathe foul air every day.

As one example, the city manager of Arvin, in Kern County, said he had no idea the board had decided to start a program to give owners of jalopies up to \$5,000 to junk then and buy cleaner cars. Arvin has the worst air quality in the Valley.

"Our relationship with the board - I can't even say it is a relationship - well, I hope to start one," City Manager Enrique Ochoa said during a hearing Tuesday on Valley air quality.

Machado has been trying to make the board more responsive for four years without success; he and Florez are the only two Valley lawmakers who have voted for Machado's legislation.

Opponents say expanding the board would make it too cumbersome and have suggested that allowing the governor to appoint two members cedes some local control to Sacramento.

Machado and Florez hope the presence of bond money changes the political equation. Their hope is use it to make expanding the board sweeter to its opponents, which include the board itself.

This year's version of the bill would link expansion to \$50 million in bond money each year until 2013. The cash could be used for research, incentives to take polluting cars, trucks and tractors off the road, or grants for clean-farming improvements.

Florez also wants to see the board start cracking down harder on polluters.

"As we hand out dollars, we will be asking the air board to balance its carrots and sticks," he said. "At some point in the game, you have to say the polluter pays, and this board hasn't gotten that yet."

Without peace in the Valley, Machado thinks equally smoggy Southern California will win again: "One only has to count the votes from south of the Tehachis," he said.

Florez is hopeful: "The reality is that voters are asking for some change. They're tired of seeing their children carrying respirators."

More details of the bill, SB240, are at www.leginfo.ca.gov.

Fireplace discount to help clear the air
Agency offers incentives to cut chimney pollution.

By Chris Bowman - Bee Staff Writer
Sacramento Bee, Saturday, Feb. 24, 2007

When it comes to fireside chats, local air pollution control officials believe money will talk louder than words.

After years of coaxing residents not to "light up the night," officials are offering a financial perk to cut chimney smoke that many health studies have linked to asthma attacks, heart attacks and higher death rates.

Starting this month and continuing through May, Sacramento County residents can apply for discounts of \$75 to \$500 on the purchase and installation of cleaner-burning fireplace inserts or heating stoves.

The savings from the vouchers are in addition to discounts that participating dealers are offering during this period.

Those who live in areas of the county where household incomes are comparatively lower can receive larger discounts. Installations must be completed by Sept. 30.

So far, more than 200 residents have applied for discount vouchers, according to the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District. The fireplace equipment retailers redeem the coupons through the district, which has budgeted \$838,500 for the program.

The incentive program is one of several local strategies for cutting chimney smoke and meeting tougher government limits on particle pollution.

Fine particle pollution is aerosols of liquid droplets and specks of soot or smoke with diameters of 2.5 micrometers or smaller -- less than 1/30 the diameter of the average human hair, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

That means they can slip past the body's defenses, lodge in the lungs and even pass into the bloodstream. Those with heart or lung disease are especially at risk, studies have shown.

Wood smoke also contains toxic carbon monoxide, hydrochloric acid and formaldehyde and other chemicals known or suspected to be cancer-causing.

Sacramento County deaths linked to the fine particles, including those in wood smoke, averaged 132 a year in 1998-2000, according to a 2002 analysis by the California Environmental Protection Agency.

Residents applying for the voucher program primarily are those who frequently rely on their open hearths or old potbellied stoves for home heating and who are motivated primarily by the potential savings in the cost of wood or natural gas.

That was the case for Ernest Lloyd Adams, who was among the first county residents to install a steeply discounted fireplace insert under a district pilot program last September.

"I'm not a tree-hugger, but I want to save money. Protecting the environment makes it that much better," said Adams, who lives with his wife on a fixed income in a 1960s-era, three-bedroom home in Carmichael.

Adams, 67, said the new wood pellet-fueled \$2,300 insert that he bought with a voucher has brought him and his wife greater savings and convenience than they expected.

He controls the fireplace heater with a remote device from his living room recliner. And the Pacific Gas and Electric Co. natural gas bill totaled all of \$19 last month, compared with about \$100 for the same time last year, Adams said.

"Most of that was for the hot-water heater," he said.

Traditional fireplaces are highly inefficient for home heating, said Jamie Arno, spokesman for the air district.

"It's warm right there next to fire, but when you walk away from it, the room is actually colder than it would have been with no fire," Arno said. "The fire is creating a draft and pulling heat right out of your house."

Debra Peck of Elk Grove said she can testify to that. Peck used the fireplace three or four times a week

during the winter to heat the ground floor of her three-story home.

It wasn't so much that her family enjoyed the fireside ambiance as it was that the home's heating system shunted most of the warmth upstairs, leaving a chilly living room, where the family spends most of its time.

A recent back and neck injury put an end to the wood fires.

"Sweeping and shoveling ashes and lugging wood is a hassle, and it's dirty," said Peck, 55.

She recently bought a new clean-burning fireplace insert, shaving \$530 off the \$3,700 price with the voucher.

"You flip a switch, and you heat the whole house. And it looks just like a regular fire," Peck said.

Air district money for the voucher program comes from fees developers pay to offset the extra pollution generated from new housing tracts and businesses in the county, officials said.

This May, the district plans to offer vouchers covering the entire costs of a cleaner fireplace for low-income residents.

Under a new district rule that takes effect Oct. 26, builders no longer will be allowed to install open fireplaces, and the sale of wood stoves without EPA-certified emission controls will be banned.

Yolo, Solano, Butte, Glenn, Yuba, Sutter and Shasta counties have restrictions similar to Sacramento's, as do parts of Placer County, including Truckee.

Gas inserts can help send heating bills up in smoke

By Ann Tatko-Peterson, MEDIANEWS STAFF

Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Saturday, February 24, 2007

WHEN JACK LIEBERUM bought his "eccentric" old Berkeley house, he inherited four wood-burning fireplaces.

"I never expected to convert all of them to gas," Lieberum says. "I had my trusty ax and I didn't think I would ever give that up."

He changed his mind. Two fireplaces have been converted to gas inserts. The other two now have gas log sets.

The reason for the switch went beyond Lieberum's job as general manager of The Tubmakers, a leading Bay Area fireplace and stove dealer in Berkeley. He was sold on the drastic improvement in efficiency and the reduction in pollutants.

Traditional open wood-burning fires can release more than 45 grams of unburned particles an hour into the air. A local physician once told Lieberum how on days when unburned particles were at their highest, so too were emergency room visits for respiratory problems.

Particulate matter pollutes the air greatest in winter when temperatures are cooler and sunlight is reduced. On these nights, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District issues Spare the Air night advisories, asking owners not to use wood-burning fireplaces. There have been 30 Spare the Air nights this winter.

Bay Area officials are now considering a no-burn rule, making it illegal - with the threat of fines - to have wood-burning fires on Spare the Air nights. San Joaquin Valley adopted this rule in 2003.

Skyrocketing PG&E bills also have prompted consumers to explore alternative heating methods for their homes.

Lieberum has seen many customers interested in getting off the grid. He suggests gas fireplace inserts, which he says are 10 to 14 times more efficient than wood fires and more cost-effective than central heat.

"I always ask them where they buy their wood - Andronico's? Safeway?" he says. "The little box of wood you get there doesn't make you a candidate to get off the grid. Unless you're getting wood for free, you are just replacing the cost of heating a good-size house on the grid with the cost of fire wood."

So, how do you replace a traditional wood burner with a more efficient and cost-effective fireplace or stove? Here are a few pointers to help navigate the options:

Gas inserts

Eleven years ago, Harold Sheats, owner of Fireplaces Plus in El Sobrante, bought a new home and installed two gas fireplaces.

"By the next year," he says, "I had turned my central air system off and heated the entire house with the two fireplaces. And my gas bills were lower than anyone else's in the neighborhood."

A prevailing misconception occurs, Lieberum says, whenever gas prices spike. Few consumers realize those spikes often are temporary.

"A lot of people who come in reacting to the price of gas end up walking out with a gas stove or insert," he says. "Natural gas is still the cheapest fuel."

-Benefits: Owners turning a garage into an in-law suite or building an addition need a legal way to heat it. Lieberman suggests using a gas fireplace.

Heater-rated units must be 73 percent efficient, while furnace-rated needs a minimum efficiency of 80 percent.

Many of these gas inserts and fireplaces come equipped with wall thermostats or remote controls, which can regulate the heat output. Some contain blowers that allow for better heating in larger rooms.

Only the blowers run on electricity, so gas fireplaces work even during blackouts.

Gas also provides convenience.

"If it's a rainy night and you settle down to watch a movie at 10 o'clock, you're not going to go out to get the wood," Lieberum says. "Here, with gas, you just turn on a switch. Instant fire."

-Aesthetics: The evolving look of gas fireplaces has helped boost their popularity.

When initially turned on, a gas flame burns blue, but within a few minutes, it turns to a more natural orange and yellow hue. The logs also look realistic because manufacturers are casting partially burned wood logs in ceramic.

"The change in looks is uncanny," Lieberum says. "I've had some people stand in front of a gas fireplace or stove and ask me if the logs burning are real wood."

Most gas fireplaces are concealed behind high-temperature ceramic glass, which allows heat to pass through it.

-Drawbacks: These fireplaces require gas lines. The cost of installing one depends on the distance from the gas meter but usually run between \$100 and \$300.

"If you have a cement floor, it's impossible to run a line underneath the house," Sheats says. "And if you have cathedral ceilings, too, I'm not saying it's impossible, but running a gas line probably wouldn't be cost effective."

Sheats says a 12-inch crawl space is reasonable for installing a gas line. Sometimes they can be connected to a furnace but often these are already at maximum output. A plumber can help determine what is best.

-Cost: An average of \$3,000 to \$3,500 will pay for the inserts and materials, including pipes, needed for the chimney. Installation costs about \$750, Lieberum says. (These costs do not include the gas line installation and permits.)

For new gas fireplaces, the expense is hard to quantify because of the range in price for material - tumbled marble, travertine, tile, etc. - available to surround the fireplace.

-Styles and options:

As with cars and new homes. options aalore can change the look of the gas fireplace or insert you

choose.

-Front: These come in flushed or bay front. The latter looks more like an insert, often overlapping onto the hearth.

-Face plates and louver finishes: Inserts have surrounds that cover the mechanical panels that operate the fireplaces. These are now designed for aesthetic appeal.

Sometimes the louvers match the face plate in color and design so they blend together. Other times fancy patterned grills may conceal the louvers.

-Clean-face: These gas fireplaces look a lot like real wood-burning fires.

They have no visible louvers or grills, only a narrow trim frame, giving a larger view of the fire. The built-in flame controls are hidden underneath.

Brick panels inside the fireplace also give it a more authentic feel. Only the glass betrays that it is a gas fire.

The Tubmakers were selling the clean-face, heater-rated models out of a brochure before they were even in stock, Lieberum says.

"These are gas guzzlers, so they're lower efficiency," he adds. "But when you walk into a living room and see one of these - ba-boom. With one of these, you get over your prejudice of gas fireplaces in a hurry."

-Coal look: Valor, which designs modern English-style fireplaces, substitutes ceramic coal for logs. "It's designed to look like what you'd find in a Victorian mansion," Lieberum says.

These smaller-sized inserts need only 12 inches depth and width and 18 inches height. They also come with wire flame-guards instead of glass.

-Screen doors: Optional screens hide the glare of the glass and provide a safety feature.

"Glass gets hot, up to 300 to 700 degrees, and if you touch that, you're going to lose some skin," Sheats says. "Screens have become very popular with our customers. Most are concerned about their kids, grandkids and pets touching the glass."

-Vents: Direct vents are the most common chosen in gas inserts. Combustion air is directed to the firebox through one pipe, while exhaust is vented outside through a second pipe. These are recommended for people living in airtight houses.

B-vent gas inserts have only a single pipe for exhaust. Combustion air is drawn through a louver below the firebox, while warm air is emitted through a top louver. B-vents often are used in fireplaces with unusual chimney systems.

The pipes for both types of vents are concealed inside the chimney.

Vent-free inserts are illegal in California.

Gas logs

These are popular for owners who want to keep the traditional fireplace look.

-Benefits: Very little has to be done to the existing fireplace. The logs must be connected to a gas line, and a chimney sweep should inspect the damper and flue.

Gas logs come in cement or ceramic, along with a grate and burner system. As with gas inserts, the logs look realistic.

-Drawbacks: Manufacturers don't advertise the efficiency of gas logs because it's not exactly a selling point.

Sheats estimates that 85 percent of the heat generated from gas logs goes up the chimney.

Logs also use two to three times more gas than an insert or gas fireplace, Lieberum says.

"The gas log is initially cheaper," he says, "but in three to four years, you will have recouped the cost if you buy a gas insert instead."

Lieberum also reminds consumers that California no longer allows standing pilots or remote controls for gas log sets.

"Gas logs are best for the person who only wants a fire a half dozen times a year," Sheats says, "They're strictly for aesthetics."

-Cost: The big selling point is the average price of \$400 to \$750 for the log set.

Wood-burning

If you love traditional wood-burning fireplaces with masonry chimneys, don't move to California, Washington, Oregon or Colorado.

All four states require that new homes and remodels install only Environmental Protection Agency approved fireplaces and stoves. They control this through issued permits.

If you want to burn wood, you'll need a stove or wood-burning insert.

-Benefits: EPA approved models emit no more than 71/2grams of unburned particles an hour.

Unlike traditional fireplaces, these offer a controlled burn with less heat escaping through the chimney/vent. Two to three logs can burn for hours, so less wood is used.

"The flames roll around and look as if they have no place to go," Lieberum says, "because they have no place to go."

-Drawbacks: When fitted into an existing fireplace, special liner material is needed for the chimney. Without the liner, "it's likely smoke would kick back into the room," Lieberum says.

Many inserts stick out onto the hearth, which requires 18 inches of clearance to meet code.

-Aesthetics: Freestanding stoves sit on pedestals or legs and often have vertical pipes that extend from the top of the firebox.

Inserts are fireboxes with surrounding grills, covering the louvers, that can fit into existing masonry fireplaces.

Often, both are made of cast iron, steel or a combination of both.

Fireplace Xtrordinair offers an arched face design that gives the grill an artistic flair. The face comes in gold, hammered wrought iron or traditional black.

-Extras: Some models are designed with an airwash system that uses cool air to push flames and exhaust away from the door, keeping it clean longer.

Some wood stoves have ash drawers that can be removed and emptied for easier clean-up.

-Cost: Average inserts and stoves cost \$1,500 to \$2,500. More stylish models, such as the Xtrordinair, can average about \$3,500.

Pellet stoves

Fifteen years ago, about 10 pellet stoves sold for every gas stove, Lieberum says. Today, those numbers have swung to 100 gas for every one pellet.

-Benefits: These are good for convenience but recommended only for homes where running a gas line is not feasible or affordable, Sheats says.

-Drawbacks: Prone to problems, such as clogged pellets, they require a lot of what Sheats calls "weekly tender loving care."

Because they run on electricity, they don't work during blackouts.

A current shortage has left many dealers without pellets to sell. Since November, The Tubmakers has sold out of two deliveries of 20 tons each, Lieberum says.

A pellet stove also has a small burn box.

"It's a terrific little heater," Lieberum says. "But it's not aesthetically pleasing because it produces a jittery fire."

-Cost: On average, pellet stoves range from \$1,200 to \$3,100.

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JAMES DULLEY: CUT YOUR UTILITY BILL **Minimal energy users add up to real money**

Contra Costa Times, Sunday, February 25, 2007

Q: You often write that little energy users add up, and I can believe that for a lot of products. But I was surprised when you mentioned a while ago that lights should be turned off when leaving a room.

Really, will that make a noticeable difference in my utility bill? And doesn't turning them on and off make them burn out faster?

A Every so often I get a letter like this about turning off lights or unplugging infrequently used electronic products or questions about other minimal energy users, and the first thing I have to say is that individually, you're right -- these little products don't use a whole lot of energy and won't make a big difference in your power bills.

But there are so many of them in the average home that if you and the other members of your household get in the habit of saving a little energy here and a little there, this will indeed add up to a number that makes a difference in how much you give your utility company every month.

At typical rates, a 100-watt light bulb costs about a penny an hour to operate. But leave it on half the day - - maybe you're even in the habit of falling asleep with the light on -- and all of a sudden you're spending around \$3.50 a month on that bulb. That's \$40 a year. And how many bulbs do you have in your home? Walk around the house and count them and you won't be surprised to hear that the average home has a couple dozen or more light bulbs, many of which are used fairly often.

So turning off unused lights when you leave a room will save a few pennies that day for electricity for that bulb, but doing this throughout the house can save literally hundreds of dollars a year. I think that qualifies as "real" money.

By the way, turning incandescent bulbs on and off won't shorten their life span any, so you won't be saving money on the cost of these bulbs (which are cheap anyway) by leaving them on. The bigger question is: Why are you still using incandescents when compact fluorescent bulbs have come down so much in price that they pay back their cost quicker and give you the light you want without the heat you don't want? The big savings in lighting comes from switching your bulbs out from incandescents to energy-saving ones. But that's a story for another day.

Q We saw Al Gore's movie on the environment and started thinking about global warming and what individuals can do to cut down on their own impact on the environment. Are you aware of some of the basic things people can do to reduce their impact on this problem?

A Actually, I am. I recently found a great Web site that gives your own energy-consumption calculator that lets you put in some basic information about your personal energy use and then gives you a good idea of how much you are contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.

The site notes that the typical American generates about 15,000 pounds of carbon dioxide every year from energy use in the home, transportation and to produce the products and services you use. Go to www.climatecrisis.net/takeaction for your own personal energy consumption calculator, and get an idea how much you're contributing to global warming. Then think about the things you can do to cut down on these amounts and help the planet. Just using a few compact fluorescent light bulbs, turning off unused electronics and other simple steps can start making a difference.

I'm often asked how one person can make a difference in helping solve our energy needs, and this site highlights the air quality part of the issue. The same goes for energy use in general. You'll not only save on your own power bills but also cut down the needed generation of your local power plants. maybe

reducing the need for new power generation and making other forms of energy more practical and available for your own community.

Yokohl Valley plan advances

Application filed to open door to building a city

By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, Feb. 24, 2007

The Yokohl Ranch Company has submitted an application that could eventually allow it to build what could become the largest urban development ever in the San Joaquin Valley.

The Yokohl Ranch Co., owned by Kings County farming giant J.G. Boswell Co., is seeking to develop more than 36,000 acres of range land in the Yokohl Valley, east of Exeter and northeast of Lindsay.

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors granted the Yokohl Ranch Co. permission a year ago to file an application to amend to the Foothill Growth Management Plan, which is an element of the county's General Plan.

The application calls for the county to amend the General Plan so that it adds planned community zoning.

Under the current General Plan, only planned development zones are included, which doesn't allow for an entire community to be developed, said countywide planning manager Theresa Szymanis.

The application submitted to the county includes preliminary land-use plans for the project, scheduled to take 25 to 30 years to build. It would include a town, three golf courses and a resort.

The application also includes a preliminary finance plan that says the town would be funded through community facility districts and community service districts. The project could eventually accommodate as many as 50,000 residents.

An environmental impact report must also be prepared before the project gains approval.

Diane Gaynor, spokeswoman for the Yokohl Ranch Co., said the company will cover the cost of the county reviewing and processing the application with a \$250,000 deposit.

Szymanis said the county will hire a project management consulting firm by March 20 that will help with engineering, environmental and financial reviews. Public input for the project will take place after the county and the consulting firm review the plans.

"Public comment won't begin until sometime in 2008," Szymanis said. "That's an ambitious goal."

Although public comment hasn't started, some Tulare County residents don't want to see the project move forward.

Kim Loeb, spokesman for the Sierra Club's Mineral King group, said the project does not follow the county's General Plan update in terms of smart growth. Smart growth advocates density concentrated in the center of a town or city, combating urban sprawl.

"It's a classic sprawl project," Loeb said. "The project is too far away from the county's current urban centers."

Loeb said traffic concerns and pollution in the foothills are also concerns.

"When you are talking about thousands of people moving into one area that need to work someplace," Loeb said, "that means you either have to build commercial and industry in the foothills or all those people will be commuting throughout the county."

Mexican trucks coming

Safety, smog concerns in trade test program

BY LISA FRIEDMAN, Washington Bureau

LA Daily News February 24, 2007

WASHINGTON - U.S. and Mexican leaders announced a test Friday to allow Mexican trucks full access

to the state and the rest of the nation, a move that alarms air quality regulators who believe it will foul Southern California's air and crumble its roads.

The one-year program allows an unlimited number of trucks from 100 Mexican companies to carry cargo beyond the current 25-mile border zone.

Estimates vary widely on how much pollution would be generated by a sharp increase in the number of polluting diesel engines on the freeways.

But one study predicted that Mexican trucks could add 50 tons per day of smog-forming emissions - more than the pollution generated by the region's 350 biggest industrial sources combined.

"This could have a major impact in terms of traffic, air quality and the border. We're going to have to take a close look at it," said Scott Gerber, spokesman for California Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

Feinstein is on the Senate Appropriations Committee panel that plans to launch an inquiry into the program next month.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who chairs the committee, questioned the Bush administration's claim that it has fulfilled a raft of safety requirements Congress mandated several years ago.

"International trade is a critical engine of our nation's economy, but safety must not be the victim when it comes to expanding trade with our partners," she said.

As part of the agreement, U.S. inspectors will be allowed to examine the trucks as well as check licenses, insurance and driving records of the Mexican drivers before they cross into the United States.

Trucks are expected to enter the U.S. within a matter of weeks.

"This program will make trade with Mexico easier and keep our roads safe at the same time," Transportation Secretary Mary Peters said during an announcement in El Paso, Texas, on the border with Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Under the North American Free Trade Agreement, Mexico and the U.S. were supposed to have allowed full access for each other's trucks by 2000. Concerns over driver and equipment safety as well as air pollution had limited them to the border zone.

But after opponents in 2004 lost a Supreme Court battle attempting to block the border opening, the administration has moved steadily forward.

The pilot program, if successful, could pave the way for full access of all Mexican trucks to U.S. roads.

Spewing smog

For California, the air-quality implications are serious, said Sam Atwood, spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality District.

Because Mexico does not have low-sulfur diesel fuel, he said trucks coming from south of the border will produce higher emissions.

That means California's attempt to meet particulate health standards by 2015 - for which the state is turning over public transportation fleets as well as other trucks - could stall.

At the same time, California also is bound by a law originally written by former Woodland Hills Assemblywoman Fran Pavley that requires Mexican trucks to meet U.S. pollution limits if they want to travel through the state.

It remains unclear, state environmental officials said, what that law will mean for the new pilot program.

Union leaders and government watchdogs maintained that the government has not done an adequate job ensuring that Mexican drivers meet safety standards.

"They are playing a game of Russian roulette on America's highways," Teamsters Union President Jimmy Hoffa Jr. said.

Rep. James Oberstar, who chairs the House Transportation Committee, said he thinks the administration has made progress since 2001 in complying with safety rules.

But he said he's still not convinced the U.S. is prepared to hold Mexican truckers to federal safety standards, noting that Mexican drivers are not restricted in the number of hours they can work.

"It is impossible to know how many hours or days a driver has been behind the wheel of a truck in Mexico, without rest, prior to crossing the border and entering our highways," he said.

"Anecdotal evidence from news reports suggests that working hours for truck drivers in Mexico go far beyond anyone's estimate of a safe, reasonable limit."

Rep. Gary Miller, R-Brea, who sits on the transportation panel, said he needs time to review the program.

"While I am a strong supporter of free trade, there are outstanding concerns regarding safety and environmental standards for Mexican trucks that must be addressed," he said.

Meanwhile, Boyce noted that as part of NAFTA, the agreement to open U.S. roads to Mexican trucks isn't a decision lawmakers can easily avoid.

"Unless Congress wants to abrogate the treaty, they have to open the border," he said.

Car dealers asked to withdraw from lawsuit

By June Woods - Tribune Writer

Madera Tribune, Saturday, February 24, 2007

Madera residents delivered letters to Madera Chevrolet Toyota Thursday to ask owner Marty Mayfohrt to remove his dealership from those suing California over its global warming law.

Mayfohrt's dealership, 1300 Country Club Dr., is one of 10 Central Valley dealerships, the group says, that remains in a lawsuit against California's law to reduce global warming emissions from vehicles.

Angela Price, who's organizing the local effort, said that as long as the lawsuit persists, the process of cleaning the air will be slowed. "Dealerships could help," she said, "by getting out of the lawsuit and pushing for cleaner-burning cars."

Mayfohrt confirmed that he is staying in the suit. "I am not against clean air," he said. "In fact the manufacturers I work with have done more for clean air than others. I am against another layer of regulations."

Mayfohrt told the group that they should instead lobby to get federal regulations changed.

Those suing California claim that the state's global warming pollution standards conflict with the federal fuel economy law. In January, a federal judge in Fresno, Judge Anthony Ishii, postponed the auto industry's suit until the Supreme Court rules on whether or not the federal Clean Air Act covers the pollution that causes global warming. That decision is expected to be returned in late spring or early summer.

The Union of Concerned Scientists, an alliance of more than 200,000 citizens and scientists, is one of the major backers of the effort to dissuade dealerships from taking part in the suit. It has focused on the Central Valley, Price said, because of how bad air quality is here.

Last week, Kitihara Pontiac GMC Buick in Fresno informed residents there that it was dropping out of the lawsuit. In December 2006, Merle Stone Chevrolet Inc. of Tulare and Merle Stone Porterville dropped out of the lawsuit.

California's Global Warming Standard for Vehicles was signed into law in 2002. It directed the California Air Resources Board to adopt regulations that require automakers to reduce global warming emissions from new passenger cars and light trucks by about 30 percent by 2016.

In December 2004 all of the major automakers and 13 Central Valley dealerships filed suit against the people of California to block the law.

Price said that most of those who delivered the letters to the Madera dealership on Thursday are associated with the Union of Concerned Scientists, but there were some from the American Lung Association there, also.

"Because the climate crisis issue is so important," Price said, "the one thing California can do is (establish) a zero emissions (policy). This would be a good first step."

Environmentalists try to talk dealers out of air suit

By JOHN ELLIS - THE FRESNO BEE

Modesto Bee, Friday, February 23, 2007

Three environmental activists have delivered dozens of letters to a auto dealership, urging it to pull out of a lawsuit that seeks to stop California from enacting new emissions standards.

Marty Mayfohrt, dealer principal and general manager of Madera Auto Center, politely accepted the letters but made it clear that his dealership remains committed to the lawsuit. "We're the most regulated industry in the world, and I don't want another layer of regulations," Mayfohrt said.

Angela Price, an activist with the Union of Concerned Scientists, a national group, tried to engage Mayfohrt in a debate on the issue. "Cars and light trucks make up almost 40 percent of global warming emissions," she told him in the showroom.

The exchange was a minor skirmish in the ongoing battle between the state and environmental activists and the automotive industry over the new regulations, which would set tailpipe emission standards for greenhouse gases.

Scheduled to take effect with the 2009 model year, the regulations are expected to cut emissions 25 percent in cars and light trucks and 18 percent in larger trucks and sport-utility vehicles.

In December 2004, more than a dozen San Joaquin Valley auto dealers -- including including Central Valley Chrysler-Jeep of Modesto -- joined DaimlerChrysler Corp., General Motors, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers and others in suing to block the new rules.

Attorneys for the automotive industry maintain California's new rules are fuel-economy standards, which can only be set by the federal government.

Last month, U.S. District Judge Anthony W. Ishii halted the lawsuit until the U.S. Supreme Court rules on a case brought by Massachusetts against the Environmental Protection Agency in which similar issues are being argued. The automotive industry also hopes it can win a similar lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Vermont. That case is scheduled to go to trial in March and is almost identical to the California lawsuit, said Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers spokeswoman Gloria Bergquist.

Locally, environmental activists emphasized the fact that three valley dealerships had withdrawn from the California lawsuit -- Kitahara Pontiac GMC Buick of Fresno, Merle Stone Chevrolet of Tulare and Merle Stone Porterville.

Larry Stone of Merle Stone said he supports the lawsuit, though his dealerships are no longer part of it. He declined to say why. "I am concerned about ," Stone said. "It could have a devastating economic impact on the valley. I wish I still could be a part of ."

Price said getting dealerships to withdraw from the lawsuit likely won't stop the California litigation, but she said she hopes it would raise awareness about global warming and increase support for California's new emission proposals.

Even if the lawsuit fails, California must obtain a waiver from the federal government before it can enforce the tougher regulations. If the state gets a waiver, other states could follow California's standards or those of the federal government.

That is what worries Mayfohrt, who drives a hybrid Toyota Prius . "We don't need the state of California doing what the federal government already does," he said.

Union Pacific touts trains

Lodi News Sentinel, Friday, February 23, 2007

FRESNO - Union Pacific expects to have spent \$5 billion by the end of the year to buy cleaner

locomotives and upgrade older engines to reduce emissions.

The company, like other railroads, is trying to invest in environmentally friendly and fuel-efficient technology to meet or exceed requirements set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The company showed off 12-cylinder-engine locomotives Wednesday in Fresno as part of a tour through California to showcase the company's GE Evolution Series, which produce 40 percent fewer emissions than the previous 16-cylinder models but have the same power, railroad officials said. A few years ago, Union Pacific rolled out hybrid locomotives in switching yards designed to cut emissions by 80 percent and use 16 percent less fuel.

5 Western governors agree to work on greenhouse gas emissions

By ROBERT TANNER, AP National Writer

In the Fresno Bee, Hanford Sentinel, Bakersfield Californian and other papers, Monday, Feb. 26, 2007

WASHINGTON (AP) -- California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and governors from four other Western states agreed Monday to work together to reduce greenhouse gases, saying their region has suffered some of the worst of global warming with recent droughts and bad fire seasons.

The governors of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington state agreed that they would develop a regional target to lower greenhouse gases and create a program aimed at helping businesses reach the still-undecided goals.

"In the absence of meaningful federal action, it is up to the states to take action to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this country," said Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, a Democrat. "Western states are being particularly hard-hit by the effects of climate change."

Schwarzenegger, a Republican, said a so-called cap-and-trade program, which lets companies that can't meet their emission reduction targets buy credits from those that reduce carbon dioxide, would provide "a powerful framework for developing a national cap-and-trade program. ... This agreement shows the power of states to lead our nation addressing climate change."

The agreement - called the Western Regional Climate Action Initiative - builds on earlier efforts by several states. The governors announced it as they gathered for the annual winter meeting of the National Governors Association.

Last year, Schwarzenegger signed California legislation imposing a first-in-the-nation emissions cap on utilities, refineries and manufacturing plants, with a goal of cutting greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020. And Schwarzenegger and British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced plans to work toward a possible joint emissions-trading market.

New Mexico and Arizona last year agreed to work to measure and report greenhouse gas emissions. A similar joint effort on climate change was agreed upon in 2003 by California, Oregon and Washington.

Carbon dioxide from burning coal, oil and other fossil fuels is the biggest of the greenhouse gases, so called because they create a heat-trapping blanket when released into the atmosphere. Others are methane, nitrous oxide and synthetic gases. Scientists say the atmosphere holds more carbon dioxide now than it has for hundreds of thousands of years.

Fish killed in cold snap leave lasting Salton Sea stench

The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Feb. 24 2007

Decomposing fish carcasses in the Salton Sea after a rare winter die-off are causing water pollution and air quality problems that existing cleanup plans may not alleviate, officials said.

The carcasses from thousands of tilapia who died after January's cold snap could create "septic conditions" on the shores, posing serious health risks, said Jose Angel, assistant executive officer for the California Water Quality Board, said this week.

Salton Sea Authority chief Rick Daniels said a cleanup of the sea's shores scheduled for March 10 will not

stop the dead fish odor, which emanates from fish that sank to the sea's bottom.

"We'll have 10 to 15 feet of odors coming out through the sea that will probably last through the summer," he said.

State Assemblywoman Bonnie Garcia said she is seeking state funds to assist with the cleanup.

Texas utility TXU is sold in boon for environmentalists

The \$45-billion buyout, the largest ever by private investors, also includes benefits for consumers.

By Janet Wilson and Peter Pae, Times Staff Writers

Los Angeles Times, Monday, Feb. 26, 2007

Directors of the biggest utility in Texas, TXU Corp., agreed Sunday to a \$45-billion buyout, with sweeping concessions for environmentalists and consumers, people involved in the deal said. It would be the largest such buyout by private investors.

The agreement calls for TXU to scrap highly controversial plans for eight new coal power plants in Texas, a promise not to build them in any other state, and a vow to double investments in wind and other alternative energy sources.

"The environmental commitments are unprecedented for a major supplier of electricity," said William K. Reilly, a former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and a senior advisor to one of the buyers, Texas Pacific Group.

Reilly confirmed the agreement. The company was expected to provide details of the deal today, including the final per-share price.

"The cooperation between the environmentalists and the investors has led us to expect a future that will be collaborative and history-making," said Reilly, who expects to serve on the new board of TXU.

An investment consortium consisting of Texas Pacific Group, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. and Goldman Sachs Group Inc. offered about \$33 billion for TXU, plus the assumption of \$12 billion in debt. The deal would surpass Blackstone Group's record-breaking buyout of Equity Office Properties Trust for \$39 billion this month.

The buyout must be approved by shareholders and utility regulators, which is far from certain, experts said.

The deal includes a carrot aimed at winning regulatory approval: Consumers would receive an immediate 6% drop in electricity bills, with an additional 4% possible after the sale is completed, according to two sources close to the negotiations.

The new company would support a mandatory cap on carbon dioxide emissions. Coal-fired power plants are responsible for about a third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

"To say TXU is just another company is like saying Muhammad Ali was just another boxer," said David Hawkins, director of the climate center at the Natural Resources Defense Council, who was recruited by Reilly two weeks ago to help hammer out a deal.

Jim Marston, a lawyer in the Texas office of Environmental Defense, a national environmental group that sued TXU to stop several coal-fired plants, met with Reilly and other investors for 17 hours Wednesday to reach an agreement.

"It's one thing for companies in California to take the lead in reducing pollution," Marston said.

"But this is Texas."

The buyout could face resistance from the Public Utility Commission of Texas, said Mark Williams of Boston University, an expert on the energy industry.

"I think this is going to be dead on arrival for them," Williams said.

"While the deal might be good for shareholders, it may not be good for customers."

Deal's Broader Effect on Coal Plants Is Uncertain

By MATTHEW L. WALD

New York Times, Monday, Feb. 26, 2007

WASHINGTON — The deal between environmental groups and the investors seeking to buy the TXU Corporation may stop that company's construction of eight new coal-fired power plants in Texas, but may have hardly any effect on the broader course of new power plants being built, according to other participants in the battle over the Texas plants.

Huge new plants will still be built, experts say, because demand is rising and because new technology can use coal to make power more cheaply than natural gas plants or other alternatives. Stopping a new generation of coal plants will have to wait for government action on carbon dioxide, many of these experts say.

"There are eight other power plants proposed by other companies that are now prepared to move onto the battlefield," said Tom Smith, an organizer with Public Citizen in Austin, Tex., who is a leading opponent of the TXU plan. Mr. Smith said that backers of the other eight plants had already filed for permits, "but they have not been moving forward because of the size of the TXU play."

TXU had scared off some competitors by proposing eight plants, using the vast scale of the plan to cut down on engineering costs.

Around the country, power companies are planning more than 150 coal plants, although the stage of work varies wildly. TXU had contracts with equipment suppliers and an architectural and engineering firm; other companies' plans are more tentative as they wait and see how demand develops. A decision by one company does not sway all the others, experts noted.

In Dallas, Laura Miller, the mayor and leader of a coalition of municipal officials that has spent \$600,000 fighting the TXU plants, said that the agreement with the national environmental groups might not get TXU as much help as it wanted. She pointed out that one of the three surviving projects, a two-unit coal plant near Waco, had drawn a negative recommendation from a panel of Texas administrative law judges because it would add to air pollution of the type already regulated. It is still opposed by local officials.

Ms. Miller said that she hoped the demise of the TXU plants, if that happens, would leave an opening for cleaner projects, like a proposal to build a power line to West Texas, where power producers propose to build big wind farms, backed up by coal and natural gas plants that would run when the wind was not blowing.

And the research her group has already done in fighting TXU might not go to waste, she said. Others could propose coal plants, possibly smaller than what TXU proposed, but "when these next guys step up by themselves with one plant, all this information is marshaled and ready to use," she said.

Energy Firm Accepts \$45 Billion Takeover

Buyers Made Environmental Pledge

By Steven Mufson and David Cho, Washington Post Staff Writers

Washington Post, Monday, Feb. 26, 2007

TXU, the largest energy provider in Texas, agreed last night to a \$45 billion buyout that would not only be the largest private-equity deal in history but would also feature an unusual twist: The buyers have promised environmental groups they would cancel a slew of coal-fired power plants on the firm's drawing boards.

The buyout firms' deal with environmental groups, which could become a landmark in the battle over climate-change policy, would force an abrupt turnaround in the strategy of TXU, which has defied environmentalists' and congressional criticism of its plans to expand coal use and carbon dioxide emissions.

The environmental agreement was the idea of the private-equity firms Texas Pacific Group and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, which made it a condition of the acquisition, according to several sources involved in the negotiations, who gave details of the deal on condition of anonymity because it had not been announced yet.

Texas Pacific's head, David Bonderman, is no stranger to creative deals in the energy sector or in the cause of environmentalism. Bonderman sits on the boards of the World Wildlife Fund and the Grand Canyon Trust. He was a key figure in negotiating with power plants in Arizona to reduce air pollution over the Grand Canyon. In the TXU case, he tasked William K. Reilly, who had led the Environmental Protection Agency under President George H.W. Bush, to reach out and negotiate with environmental groups.

If shareholders approve the acquisition, TXU would back federal legislation that would require reductions in carbon dioxide emissions through a cap-and-trade system. It would shelve plans for eight of 11 coal-fired plants that current TXU executives had proposed for Texas and would drop plans to build new coal plants in Pennsylvania and Virginia. The company would also double its spending to promote energy efficiency, to \$80 million a year, for five years.

"We think this is really a big deal, a watershed moment in America's fight against global warming," said Jim Marston, regional director of Environmental Defense in Austin, who helped forge the environmental accord in a 17-hour negotiating session with the buyout firms on Wednesday. He said it would reshape the electricity sector in Texas and alter the attitudes of Texas congressmen toward climate-change legislation.

The buyout firms also promised to cut TXU's emissions of carbon dioxide, the most prevalent of greenhouse gases scientists blame for global warming, to 1990 levels by 2020. This matches the targets contained in legislation passed last year in California but exceeds anything TXU is obligated to achieve. When the three new coal plants are on line, the company's emissions are projected to be nearly 20 percent higher than they were in 1990.

In return, Environmental Defense, which has been leading the fight against TXU's coal expansion plans, would drop its objections to the three large new units, including two 800-megawatt units at Oak Grove, Tex., and a 600-megawatt plant at Sandow, Tex. The private-equity firms held an initial round of talks on Friday with another environmental group that opposes the Oak Grove units.

The unusual talks between the buyout firms and environmental groups began Feb. 14. Reilly, who now heads a Texas Pacific subsidiary that invests in water projects in the developing world, called Fred Krupp, president of Environmental Defense.

"Reilly told us that they were negotiating to buy TXU but that they would not go through with the deal unless they could re-create the company as a green electricity generator," Marston said.

Last Tuesday, Marston got a phone call asking him to get on a plane in two hours and fly to the Texas Pacific headquarters in downtown San Francisco. Talks began 8 a.m. in a Texas Pacific conference room, and by 1 a.m. Thursday, they had a three-page list of commitments. Then the buyout executives flew in a private jet to Austin to discuss them with Texas Gov. Rick Perry (R) and other state leaders.

Although the deal is not a contract and wasn't signed, the buyout firms say they intend to fulfill the commitments.

The board of TXU met last night to vote on the leveraged buyout, which would eclipse the previous record of \$31.3 billion, paid for RJR Nabisco in 1989. That deal was the subject of the popular journalistic account "Barbarians at the Gate." Texas Pacific and KKR would pay about \$70 per share for TXU, or about \$32 billion, and assume more than \$12 billion in debt. The deal could be officially announced as early as today.

Bonderman is trying to ensure that this buyout has a happier ending than a utility deal he attempted in 2004. Then, Bonderman tried to acquire Portland General Electric from the bankrupt Enron, but it ended up as a public relations disaster. Despite efforts to assuage customers and grass-roots groups, the buyout sparked picketing and vociferous opposition from Oregon legislators. The state's utility commission rejected the proposal in 2005.

This time, Bonderman was personally involved in the initial meetings with environmental groups. He assigned Reilly to lead the negotiations. He and his partners at Kohlberg Kravis Roberts also told TXU that they would walk away from the deal if the energy giant didn't scale down its coal plant expansion plans as a concession to environmental groups.

"Anyone doing an energy investment in today's situation has got to be sensitive of the change in the attitudes of the culture and the change in the attitudes of the country, and particularly the attitudes of Congress," said a person involved in the negotiations who spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal had not yet been announced.

But there are financial advantages to the environmental agreement, as well. When they acquire companies, private-equity firms typically try to cut costs rather than expand operations. TXU had estimated that the ambitious coal plant expansion would cost at least \$10 billion; others suggested that with soaring construction costs, the ultimate price tag could be much higher.

Many power industry executives said they doubted TXU ever meant to build all 11 plants. "I think it is a bit of a gimmick," said the chief executive of another utility, who spoke on condition of anonymity for business reasons. He said that deregulation of the utility business in Texas has opened the state to competition on power generation. But with TXU claiming to build so much new generation, "who's going to jump in and say they don't believe them?"

Sources involved in the negotiation said TXU's assets -- which encompass a retail business with 2.4 million customers; more than 50 generating plants, including a nuclear facility; and a power wholesale business -- would not be split up if the deal gains approval from shareholders.

A turnaround at TXU would represent a reproach to C. John Wilder, TXU's chief executive, who in the past has criticized new technology that burns coal with fewer greenhouse gases as too expensive or technologically unsound. Although he is expected to retain his position at TXU, Wilder would be expected to consult with a new environmental advisory board that would include representatives from Environmental Defense and the Natural Resources Defense Council in San Francisco.

California poised to require emission data on new-car labels

New California vehicles would have stickers showing the amount of greenhouse gases they produce, starting with the 2009 model year.

From Bloomberg News

In the Los Angeles Times, Saturday, Feb. 24, 2007

California is preparing to label new autos to show for the first time the vehicles' annual emissions of so-called greenhouse gases linked to global warming.

The stickers, the first in the U.S., should be approved by the California Air Resources Board by June and should start appearing on 2009 model cars and light trucks, board spokesman Jerry Martin said. The board will hold a hearing next month on the labels.

"They'll probably include some kind of estimate for annual carbon dioxide emissions, for example," Martin said. The labels may be integrated into window stickers required by the Environmental Protection Agency that show fuel economy and exhaust-pollution estimates.

The move by California, the only state allowed to set pollution rules stricter than U.S. standards, is part of efforts to curb emissions of carbon dioxide, which the state says is raising the earth's temperature. California accounts for about 12% of U.S. new-vehicle sales.

California is being sued by major carmakers seeking to block a program that would require lower carbon dioxide emissions in any vehicles sold in the state, the most populous in the U.S.

The new greenhouse-gas stickers "will be helpful for those consumers who are concerned about that issue," said Charles Territo, a spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, the group suing California on behalf of General Motors Corp., Ford Motor Co., DaimlerChrysler and Toyota Motor Corp. Because of persistent air-quality problems, California since the 1970s has been authorized to set pollution rules that are more stringent than those elsewhere in the U.S.

Some NASCAR teams find it's not easy to get the lead out

By Tim Sullivan

San Diego Union Tribune, February 26, 2007

FONTANA - Reversing their traditional relationship, the gas stepped on the drivers yesterday.

NASCAR's lead-footed stock car racers ran their first race on unleaded fuel in yesterday's Auto Club 500 at California Speedway, but the mandate to go green left some of them seeing red.

Engine failures eliminated three of the top seven qualifiers. Kasey Kahne, who had qualified second, left the race on Lap 129 unable to explain a loss of power, a surge of smoke, sudden vibrations and an unpleasant odor. Dale Earnhardt Jr., experiencing ominous symptoms after blowing two motors in testing, pulled out on Lap 74 in order to salvage something for his mechanics to study.

"This unleaded fuel has sprung a little bit of a surprise on us - a little bit of a curveball," Earnhardt said. "I know the guys at the shop that built those motors are really upset right now."

If last week's Daytona 500 represented racing as sensory overload - what with a cheating scandal, a hood-length margin of victory, a caution flag controversy and Clint Bowyer's Chevrolet crossing the finish line upside down and on fire - this day's drama was comparatively short on spectacle.

Matt Kenseth successfully defended his 2006 Auto Club 500 title and completed a weekend sweep of races by holding off Jeff Gordon by .679 seconds after a late flat hobbled Daytona winner Kevin Harvick.

Even Kenseth confessed that he had expected Harvick to run him down at the finish, but this was a day when speed ran second to reliability. In addition to the annual adjustments from Daytona's restrictor-plate requirements to the unfettered racing more common on the Nextel Cup circuit, NASCAR's new environmental initiative created uncertainty and caused frustration among several teams accustomed to running on tetraethyl lead.

It's definitely different the way it runs - the way it takes off on restarts and how it shifts," Kahne said. "We've got some things to work on and figure out, but I think the unleaded fuel is fine. We've just got to learn how to make it work."

With emissions standards toughening, particularly in California, NASCAR responded last year by announcing that unleaded fuel would be required in all of its races beginning in 2008. That timetable was moved up to coincide with yesterday's race following a series of encouraging tests of Sunoco's 260 GTX blend.

Though the fuel change was long overdue from an environmental standpoint - and not only for the sake of the ozone layer, but also to protect pit crews inhaling hazardous fumes - the potential impact on competition was not immediately clear. Leaded fuels provide engines with greater lubrication - a critical consideration at 850 horsepower - and finding an unleaded alternative that would provide enough octane proved a multiyear process.

For some teams, the testing continues.

"The motor just broke, just blew up, just like that," said Martin Truex Jr., who left yesterday's race on the 14th lap. "We didn't have any warning. Just out of the blue."

Ken Schrader started 36th, finished 36th, and left the track with no better answers than when he arrived.

"I don't know anything about those engines, other than ours broke," Schrader said. "That's very unusual for a Roush-Yates motor. They're good, dependable engines. It could be a little bit of (a fuel issue). This is the first real good test for it."

Though several prominent teams plainly flunked the test, and Jeff Gordon said he was "curious" to look at his engine after 500 miles on unleaded fuel, the overall picture had to please NASCAR. With 33 cars still running at the finish - 17 of them on the lead lap - fuel would appear to have posed fewer problems yesterday than did the cool weather conditions that affected race setups.

"We went through testing, practice and qualifying and we looked at the valve seats and inspected the engines carefully," said Jack Roush, whose Roush Fenway Racing runs Kenseth's team. "From what I can see, the people that had trouble, it didn't relate to the fuel. The fuel gave us good fuel mileage and it performed admirably."

Roush's conclusions had to bring comfort to the embattled stewards of the sport. With five of its crew

chiefs serving suspensions following a convulsive week in Florida, NASCAR has no need for fresh controversies. No need to add fuel to the fire.

Enron prosecutor takes on Navajo uranium cleanup

The tribe hires John C. Hueston to press the U.S. to remove toxic material from its land.

By Judy Pasternak, Times Staff Writer
Los Angeles Times, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007

The Southern California lawyer who successfully prosecuted top Enron executives has been hired by the Navajo tribal government to seek a full cleanup of the old uranium mines contaminating the country's largest reservation.

John C. Hueston, who gained fame for his questioning of Enron founder Kenneth L. Lay, contacted the tribe in November after reading articles in The Times about the poisoning of the Navajo homeland as the government mined uranium for use in nuclear weapons. The reports detailed how residents had been exposed to radiation and toxic heavy metals in their [air](#), water, soil and even the walls and floors of their homes.

The tribe retained the former federal prosecutor Thursday to coordinate an effort to finish the cleanup and eventually to help Navajos made ill by exposure. Hueston, whose wife is Navajo, recently returned to private practice at Irell & Manella, which is based in Los Angeles and Newport Beach.

"There's a sense of urgency now, of no more excuses," Hueston said, pledging to work toward "a historic settlement and, if necessary, court action." He said he would try to persuade the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to document the remaining hazards, and the uranium industry to finance repair of that damage.

The tribe also wants to find permanent remedies for hundreds of reclaimed mines that are once more radioactive because of erosion.

More than 1,000 old uranium mines and four abandoned processing mills are scattered across the Navajo Nation, which spans parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. From 1944 to 1986, 3.9 million tons of uranium ore were extracted by private companies from the region.

As the Cold War threat diminished and the boom slowed, federal inspectors let the companies leave without sealing mine portals, filling in pits or removing waste. The Navajos' subsequent pleas for help prompted government surveys showing dangerous levels of uranium and other toxics, but little was done about it.

"We hope to be the moving force this time," said Navajo Atty. Gen. Louis Denetsosie. "We can't wait for them to do it for us."

EPA representatives are to meet in March with Hueston and tribal attorneys.

The federal agency has said it didn't have the funds to address the problems. Hueston said if the EPA couldn't find the funds, he would ask Congress for help. He said he would also press uranium companies to contribute to "a permanent and effective cleanup."

2-Year Study of Polar Changes Set to Begin

By ANDREW C. REVKIN
New York Times, Monday, Feb. 26, 2007

Scientists from more than 60 countries are preparing to fan out around the North and South Poles in an ambitious two-year effort to understand the vital, shifting dynamics of ice, oceans and life at the ends of the earth.

With a budget of about \$350 million spread over more than 120 projects, researchers will camp on drifting Arctic Ocean sea ice and trek to largely uncharted Antarctic mountains.

They will use gliding underwater robots, giant icebreaking ships, satellites and other technologies to explore polar climate, biology, geology and ocean chemistry, and they will undertake physics and

astronomy studies that can be done only at the poles.

A central goal of the effort — called the International Polar Year despite its two-year timetable — is to clarify the role of greenhouse gases and global warming in the rapid changes that are already occurring at both poles.

In the Arctic, sea ice in summer has been in an accelerating retreat. In parts of Antarctica that are warming, coastal ice shelves and inland ice sheets have been disintegrating and surging seaward in ways that could hint at a faster rise in global sea levels in coming decades.

But at both poles, scientists say, questions still outnumber answers.

The project will formally begin Thursday. Opening ceremonies will be held today in Washington, London and Strasbourg, France.

This is just the fourth such integrated Arctic and Antarctic science effort since 1881. The last such project, which included broader studies of the oceans and earth, ended in 1958.

John H. Marburger III, the science adviser to President Bush, said the United States had a vital interest in studies at both poles.

“The North Pole is in our backyard,” he said in an e-mail message. “The U.S. has huge geopolitical interests in the Arctic region, and we need to understand the changes that are taking place there. Many other countries have direct economic interests in the Arctic, and all are served by joining forces in I.P.Y. research. Additionally the rapidly diminishing ice in the Arctic is creating new opportunities for transport and marine resource development.

“The South Pole is on a major continent, still poorly understood,” Dr. Marburger added. “With the exception of the Arctic Ocean, all the oceans of the Earth communicate in the Antarctic region, which makes it a significant factor in processes of global change, particularly as influenced by ocean currents. It offers remarkable opportunities for astronomy, and is already the site of a sophisticated neutrino detector utilizing the deep and stable ice deposits near the pole.

“Antarctic marine organisms are an integral part of the increasingly vulnerable marine wildlife environment, and play a significant role in the world food chain.”

Other studies will examine the impact of pollution, retreating sea ice, thawing tundra and other fast-changing conditions on native communities ringing the Arctic Ocean.

Some projects are utilitarian, like fresh surveys of ocean-bottom terrain and studies sifting for hints of oil and gas or other natural resources.

But the most pressing questions being pursued relate to warming caused by the atmospheric buildup of heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide. Experts involved with the polar year say the earth’s coldest places are likely to be especially affected.

“The poles are going to lead the way in climate change,” said Ted Scambos, a researcher at the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colo. “To know what we’re in for in the next 10 years, in sea level or in climate, we need to look at the poles now. They are the amplifiers of the small warming that greenhouse gases cause.”

Particularly urgent, many experts said, is the need to improve understanding of the complicated forces that might cause warming ice sheets in Greenland and parts of Antarctica to flow more quickly into the sea.

Greenland’s vast ice cap is twice the size of California, and it holds as much water as the Gulf of Mexico. If it all melted, sea levels from Boston to Bangladesh would rise more than 20 feet, experts say.

The latest report on sea level trends by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said such melting could take a millennium or more. But because of a lack of long-term measurements and poor understanding of the physics of ice, that analysis largely excluded hints of an accelerating flow of ice and meltwater from Greenland into the seas.

“The change of phase from snow and ice to water is the biggest tipping point in the earth’s system. and

so although the International Polar Year covers a huge range of science, for me the big issue is climate change and the impact that it's having here," said Chris Rapley, the director of the British Antarctic Survey, in a message from Antarctica.

"Over the next two years, I'm looking forward to major progress on key issues," he said. "The trillion-dollar question from the point of view of sea-level rise: how much, how quickly?"

The climatic equations are complicated. Over the two years — researchers want to study both regions through complete summer and winter cycles — teams will examine the effects of shifting solar activity, greenhouse gases and the synthetic chemicals that harm the ozone layer, which have an outsize impact at the poles.

Other scientists will intensively study the warming of the permafrost and tundra across vast stretches of northern continents for signs that thawing ground, bogs and lakes are giving up emissions of methane and carbon dioxide.

Marine scientists will plumb the Arctic Ocean and productive waters around Antarctica to see how shifts in sea ice and ocean currents affect species from clouds of shrimplike krill to whales, penguins and polar bears.

Most of these subjects have already been a focus of research. But several veteran earth and polar scientists said periodic intensive efforts like the polar years helped them to generate fresh ideas, collect data that individual countries lack the resources to pursue, and refresh the public's appreciation for the splendor of the world's least-habitable places.

Walter Munk, 89, an emeritus professor of geophysics at the University of California, San Diego, who helped run the 1957-58 effort (called the International Geophysical Year), said that what was needed most was long-term studies of earth's poles and oceans.

But he added that the polar year would provide a necessary short-term focus. "Our society is poorly conditioned for sustained efforts," he said in an e-mail message. "I rather think that without the occasional burst there would have been even less of a sustained effort."

Boomers' New Ride

The Middle-Aged Are Going Green, and the Automakers Follow

By Sholnn Freeman, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007

At the grocery store, Lloyd Lachow buys organic milk and fruit. At the dealership, he shops for hybrids.

"It's a cultural thing," Lachow says. "I'm somebody who doesn't think global warming is a myth. I understand what science is. I take those things seriously and act accordingly."

Lachow, 55, is a baby boomer. The generation, born in the years between the end of World War II and the early 1960s, has driven every major automotive buying trend since the late 1970s, when boomers began giving up on Detroit's gas-guzzlers. They flocked to the small, boxy imports built by Toyota and Honda.

In the 1980s, they dissed station wagons in favor of minivans. As their wealth grew during the decade, they moved up to sexier and brawnier sport-utility vehicles to carry their growing families, their shopping bags and their boats. Along the way, they left behind the luxury of Lincoln and Cadillac for the foreign marques of Acura, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Lexus.

Now, the boomers could be on the verge of making another major turn. After decades of indifference, they are starting to change their buying habits in response to global warming. And automakers are rolling out a growing list of vehicles to take advantage of the changing attitudes.

Environment-conscious consumers have choices beyond the Toyota Prius and Honda Civic hybrids, such as other hybrids, diesels, high-mileage small cars with traditional gasoline engines, and ethanol-powered vehicles. Lachow, a Toyota devotee since the early 1990s, bought a Toyota Camry hybrid last year, a decision he says was motivated by concern over the environment.

Green drivers can find a cadre of subcompact, conventional gasoline-powered cars like Toyota's Yaris and Honda's Fit, which burst onto the U.S. market as hot sellers last year.

Hybrids, which even recently were viewed as a fad, are gaining traction in the marketplace. Toyota's Prius, of course, is king of the category. Toyota expects to sell 150,000 Prius cars this year, up 50 percent from last year. Tight supply had forced would-be buyers onto month-long waiting lists, but now the supply is more plentiful. Dealers say the automaker is intent on pushing hybrids -- including the Prius - into the mainstream U.S. auto market. Toyota has sweetened deals on the Prius, enticing new customers like Joe Morra, a government attorney who lives in Rockville. Earlier this month, Morra was weighing the purchase of a new Prius at Lake Forest Toyota in Maryland.

"I'm almost 50 years old," Morra said. "I was raised at the tail end of the 1950s, when environmental activism was born. Concern for the environment has been instilled in me my whole life. I recycle. I plant trees. I am a member of the Wildlife Fund. I view owning a car as a necessary evil."

Toyota also sells the Highlander hybrid SUV, while Ford has the Escape and Mercury Mariner hybrids. The hybrid sedan market got a boost recently with the introduction of a hybrid-powered Nissan Altima. Saturn's Aura hybrid sedan is on the way.

Lexus is the sole luxury brand pushing hybrids, but the move hasn't engendered a lot of love from environmentalists, who complain the company is focusing on performance over improving fuel economy. Lexus has the GS 450 hybrid (\$55,000) with 340 horsepower that accelerates to 60 miles per hour in the five-second range. It also has the upcoming LS 600h, the first hybrid system tied to a powerful V-8 engine. Typically, automakers take advantage of a hybrid's electric motors to fit vehicles with smaller gasoline engines, cutting down the use of fuel.

"Instead of taking the opportunity to put in a smaller, more fuel-efficient engine, Lexus put in big, gas-guzzling engines, giving you even more power than you had and in many cases more power than most people will ever use," said David Friedman, research director for the clean-vehicles program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "If we focus our hybrids on keeping fuel economy steady and boosting power, we are going to be spending a lot of money to run in place. That's what we've been doing for the past 20 years."

A hybrid truck category is building momentum, too. General Motors plans to roll out its highly anticipated hybrid versions of the Chevrolet Tahoe and GMC Yukon this year.

Consumers also can find flexible-fuel vehicles, which can run on a fuel blend of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline. The use of corn-based ethanol has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles by 10 to 20 percent. Other biofuels in development have the potential to cut global-warming gases by as much as 80 percent. But environmental groups question the benefits of ethanol largely because the factories that produce it emit their own greenhouse gases. And fewer than 1,200 of the 176,000 fueling stations in the country sell E85. Most are in the Midwest.

Natural gas is making its way into the commercial car market. One vehicle, Honda's Civic GX, is powered by the clean-burning fuel. The car is available only in New York and California, where it's easiest to find stations that dispense the fuel. There are a few more than 700 stations in the country that sell natural gas as a car fuel.

Mercedes-Benz is betting on luxury diesel sedans. Diesels emit 15 to 20 percent less carbon dioxide per mile than gas-powered vehicles, when taking into account the fuel production. Mercedes's E320 BlueTec diesel sedan (\$52,000 sticker price) gets 32 miles per gallon on the highway and 23 in the city.

Diesel models are a tricky option for the earth-conscious, however. Although they cut down on emissions of global-warming gasses, their dirty exhaust has long been a top public-health concern. Auto companies think they can overcome these challenges with better engine technology and cleaner fuel. European nations have moved to diesels to meet carbon dioxide reduction targets. Volkswagen, BMW and Honda have all pledged to expand their diesel lineups in the U.S. market.

Susan Gayle of Arlington bought an E-320 diesel in January. The 51-year-old financial services executive had promised herself that her next car would be better for the environment.

"Maybe its my age or just having a grandson," Gayle said. "He's almost 2. I hope the resources are there so he's able to drive and the other natural resources are in good condition -- the water and the air. I really didn't think about it before until recently."

Gayle says she ignored the warnings and horror stories from friends about diesels -- difficulty in finding diesel pumps, the slow starts and the noise. "I'm finding it's not hard to find the fuel," she said. "They don't make noise, and they start up right."

Some buyers of hybrid cars aren't motivated solely by altruism. Federal tax credits for their purchases also figure into the picture. The credit ranges from \$250 to several thousand dollars, depending on the hybrid vehicle and when it is bought. The government limits the allotment of credits available to each manufacturer. It's too late, for example, to get the full \$3,150 credit on a 2006 or 2007 Prius because Toyota sold so many last year. The Internal Revenue Service lists the available hybrid tax credits on its Web site, <http://www.irs.gov>.

But some perks for owning a hybrid are vanishing. Some carpool lanes in Virginia no longer allow hybrids carrying just the driver -- a benefit once enjoyed by hybrid owners -- because of complaints that the gas-electrics were causing crowding. A special tax credit in Virginia for hybrid buyers is also being phased out after the current filing season.

Fuel-economy expectations for hybrids are also being reset. The Environmental Protection Agency has instituted new testing guidelines that try to better take into account real-world driving conditions. The change means significantly lower fuel-economy ratings for hybrids. The Prius, which was rated at 60 miles per gallon for stop-and-go city traffic, gets 48 miles to the gallon under the new system. In highway driving, the Prius rating fell from 51 miles per gallon to 45 miles per gallon.

Americans, who make up about 5 percent of the world's population, are responsible for 45 percent of the world's carbon emissions from cars and light trucks. In studies, focus groups and surveys, Americans are increasingly showing that they understand global warming and want to do something about it, according to Madelyn Hochstein, a trends analyst at DYG, a social and marketing research firm of Danbury, Conn. She pointed to Gallup data showing that 74 percent of Americans in 2006 said that they had a good understanding of global warming, up from 53 percent in 1992.

She characterized today's boomers as carrying an "idealism gene" from the 1960s and early 1970s. Boomers went through a "quality of life" period in the 1980s and 1990s -- a period in which they wanted to be pampered and indulged, she said. Their worldview changed after the terrorist attacks in 2001, and they began to pay closer attention to national and international issues. One area of focus concerns fossil fuels: energy consumption, energy independence and global warming.

"The environment is meshing more and more with economic issues themselves," Hochstein said. Boomers "see these environmental issues as part of the problem, not some separate thing to focus on."

Today's environmentalism differs from saving the whales and the rainforests or patching the hole in the ozone layer, Hochstein said. People today are more likely to express their commitment on a more personal level -- through the choices they make about consumption.

She likens the Toyota Prius to the organic produce sections in grocery stores. Hochstein, who advises BMW, thinks Americans are on the verge of making a stronger commitment to the environment, one that calls for a more socially responsible approach in the use of natural resources.

"I do believe there will be more consumer demand coming for vehicles that respect this new ethic," Hochstein said.

Daniel Gorrell, an expert in car-buyer psychology based in San Diego, sees a coming era of preening and pretentiousness related to the environment. "Buying a car is usually 90 percent related to you," Gorrell said. "It's not about saving the world. It's about making a statement about yourself and your values and that you are caring and conscientious. 'Hey, look at me -- I'm somebody who's special.' "

Solar handbags? How to get green

By Svlvia Westall. Reuters

Washington Post, Sunday, February 25, 2007

LONDON (Reuters) - The idea of renewable energy at home is no longer as distant as an offshore wind farm. More companies are waking up to the popularity of green energy and the Web hosts many sites showing steps people can take -- or gadgets they can buy -- to use renewable technology, from renting a solar panel to burning calories with a pedal-powered washing machine.

CLEAN LIVING

- To make the case for energy efficiency, the European Commission provides a carbon calculator and suggestions on how to cut down on energy use, including tips from celebrities.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/campaign/index_en.htm

- In Australia, the government provides an informative site on green suppliers, appliances and eco-friendly lifestyle options. <http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/education/tips/consumers.html>

- Going one step further, the Web sites of international charities Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are home to definitive green guides and feature daily tips from members of the public.

<http://www.greenpeace.org>, <http://www.foe.co.uk/living/tips/index.html>

POWER HOUSE

- For homeowners wanting to make a serious commitment to green power, the U.S. Department of Energy provides useful calculators to add up the savings from devices like solar heaters:

<http://www.eere.energy.gov>

- If buying a solar panel sounds daunting, customers can rent one at <http://renu.citizenre.com/> The company says on its Web site that over 5,000 people have already signed up for the scheme in the United States and the manufacturing plant has not even been completed.

- British home improvement store B&Q launched a range of roof-top wind turbines and solar panels in September. The devices, which are available from around 1,500 pounds (\$2,923), can be bought at <http://www.diy.com>

- Customers across the globe can visit <http://www.surfacepower.com> and find out about total renewable energy systems in the home.

- Even people on online auction site eBay are in on the act, offering solar panels and wind turbines to bidders: <http://www.ebay.com>

HANDBAGS AT DAWN

- It may not be Prada, but the solar-paneled handbag can recharge mobile phones and music players on the go. Designed by Joe Hynek, the 'power purse' comes with a designer price tag of \$300, but is an unusual accessory for the environmentally conscious: <http://www.solarjo.com>

- Backpackers can also tap into the trend for a fraction of the price thanks to Unison Light, a company which offers solar panel backpacks from around \$35: <http://www.globalsources.com>

- The wind-up radio is still going strong after its invention 12 years ago. The Web site <http://www.ethicalsuperstore.com> offers wind-up phone chargers and radios from 30 pounds.

- In the home, ambitious environmentalists and health fans can eliminate two chores in one with a pedal-powered washing machine. Details are available at <http://cycleclean.biz>

GREEN HOUSE

Energy suppliers are falling over themselves to flag up their green credentials, but switching to a supplier which invests in renewable technology does not always mean customers receive green energy.

- The Environmental Protection Agency in the U.S provides consumers with detailed information on green power investment at <http://www.epa.gov/greenpower> and encourages companies to show non-renewable energy the door.

- In Europe, www.greenprices.com lists green suppliers and their credentials, making choosing a supplier a breeze. The Web site says that often a simple phone call is enough to switch to eco-friendly power.

POLITICAL POWER

Governments can provide backing to green consumers who may be worried about burning a hole in their pocket bigger than the one in the ozone layer.

- State-by-state cash incentives in the United States feature on a database at <http://www.dsireusa.org>, while in Britain the low-carbon buildings program offers grants for devices like solar panels and turbines. <http://www.lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk>

- On a wider scale, <http://www.climatecare.org> gives details of how to offset carbon emissions and funding for renewable devices in countries including India.

Links to the Web sites featured in this article, and to other renewable-friendly pages, are available on the social bookmark site <http://del.icio.us/reutersrenewables>

[The Fresno Bee, Editorial, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007:](#)

No nuclear plant in my backyard, thank you

By Bill McEwen

I'm for bold strokes and taking chances. Unless you're talking about putting a nuclear energy plant in my backyard.

That's when I head to the back of the line screaming, "Beware the torpedoes! Full speed retreat!"

Let another city be the guinea pig, if California ever permits another nuclear power plant to be built.

How about Barstow?

If the desert starts glowing, people headed to and from Las Vegas might have a reason to stop besides gas.

The people pushing nuclear power in Fresno say reactor safety has significantly improved in the past 30 years.

Know what I want to hear?

Nuclear reactors are completely safe, and the federal government has figured out what to do with that pesky spent fuel.

Know what else?

I must be convinced that the people proposing nuclear construction know what they're doing before I even entertain the idea that four identical control rooms and 4-foot-thick concrete domes will protect me and my loved ones from disaster. Right now, I'm not a believer.

One reason is they brought Patrick Moore to Fresno.

He used to be with Greenpeace. Now he's a mouthpiece for a pro-nuclear group called the Clean and Safe Energy coalition. Moore also is a "consultant" -- a word that means opinions and reputation available to the highest bidder. People had to pay -- \$10 for adults, \$5 for students -- to hear Moore. Excuse me, but if you're trying to convince the masses that an incandescent purple-and-pink elephant will lower their energy bills, you don't charge to peek under the circus tent.

If you want to rally support for nuclear power, you rent the Save Mart Center, hire the Rolling Stones and let everyone in free.

That way, people would think you're pretty sharp -- and loaded with money.

Money is important.

If the Nuclear Brotherhood is going to win me over, I want to see billions and billions of Benjamins in their portfolios. And I want to know that the people designing and operating the plant are 21st-century Einsteins.

I also want to know where the plant would go. And how many partners in Fresno Nuclear Energy Group

LLC will live downwind of the operation. A confession: I was tempted to skip our little nuclear debate because it'll be a long time before a new plant is built in California.

But knowing the ins and outs of our state politics, I had to admit that if nuclear power returns to California, that first plant probably will be here in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley.

The Valley is California's dumping ground. We take everyone else's prisoners and sewer sludge and say it's good for our economy.

Imagine the spin for nuclear. Fresno is centrally located. Fresno needs jobs, especially high-tech jobs. The plant will clean the Valley's crummy air.

Know what?

I'm coming around.

I'd love to live in the city that gets the fourth plant after the nuclear moratorium is lifted.

Upwind, of course.

And only if they use 10-foot- thick concrete domes.

[Editorial in the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007:](#)

WAYNE MADSEN: Credits provide ingenious way to halt global warming

Contributing writer for the liberal Online Journal

The framers of the Kyoto treaty to combat global warming recognized that governments and industries needed a huge economic carrot to cut man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other dangerous greenhouse gases.

Prodded by then-Vice President Al Gore, they wisely devised a free-market approach that allowed nations and companies to meet targeted caps on greenhouse emissions through a system of worldwide trading credits. Participants emitting less than the target amounts could sell their surplus "greenhouse gas credits" or "Certified Emission Reductions" to participants who were emitting more than allowed.

This ingenious system gave low-carbon emitters a financial incentive to reduce their "carbon footprint" and make still more money, while permitting heavier producers a chance to reduce their "carbon tax" by lowering their own emissions.

The Clinton administration led the push for the greenhouse gas credit trading system, only to see the Bush administration scrap Kyoto and refuse to establish a national credit trading system.

But all is not lost. As the realization slowly dawns that global warming poses an apocalyptic threat to the planet, greenhouse gas credit trading systems are being adopted worldwide. The Chicago Climate Exchange, the European Climate Exchange and such avant garde green states as California, Massachusetts and New York have taken the lead by establishing their own trading systems. Progressive American-based companies like IBM, International Paper and DuPont already are trading emissions credits on the Chicago Exchange -- a financial maneuver that allowed them to meet a goal of reducing emissions by 4% in 2006.

Under Kyoto and the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme, nations with surplus emission credits also can sell their credits to countries that have trouble meeting their emission targets. Generating \$3 billion in revenue last year, the emission trading system has become a lucrative market for smart investors with an eye to the future.

Kyoto's Clean Development Mechanism permits developed countries like Germany and France to establish green industries in countries like India and Uganda and receive credits for their own emission targets. Developing nations reap the benefits of green technology to reduce their own emissions. The financial incentives for slashing greenhouse gas emissions have spurred the growth of eco-friendly wind and solar power industries -- especially in Germany, Sweden and France.

Sadly, a few anti-scientific foot-draggers -- George W. Bush and his sycophantic conservative buddies like Australia's Prime Minister John Howard and Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper are the chief offenders -- drag their feet and even interfere in the global effort to save our environment.

Fortunately, Senate and House Democrats -- aided by a growing number of enlightened Republicans -- are drafting legislation that would establish a national greenhouse emissions trading system.

The legislation, of course, faces strong opposition from the White House, pro-business lawmakers, Big Three auto lobbyists and myriad others quite happy with the disastrous status quo of six years of global warming denial by the once-dominant GOP.

Pressure must be brought to bear on Congress to get with the program to roll back global warming before it triggers a wave of unprecedented disasters that flood the world's coastal cities and kill millions.

Adoption of the innovative greenhouse gas credit trading system is a major first step in the struggle to pull our planet back from the precipice of total environmental collapse. The recent Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change report presenting the scientific findings of researchers from 113 countries served to accentuate the peril of our present "do-nothing" strategy. Thousands of the world's most distinguished scientists have now concluded that unprecedented climate change is a clear and growing danger to the planet.

Although some argue that greenhouse gas credit trading is a mere baby step toward curbing climate change, it is the very least that Congress can do to have the United States, the world's greatest polluter, meet its social and moral responsibilities.

[Editorial in the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007:](#)

PETE SEPP: Emissions credits aimed at devastating U.S. economy **Vice president for communications with the National Taxpayers Union**

ALEXANDRIA, Va. -- Can we teach cows to mind their manners? In the wake of a recent U.N. finding that flatulence and manure from the world's livestock are major contributors to global warming, that is one of the many perturbing questions facing those who seek a government clampdown on carbon emissions.

The answers to such questions are not encouraging. Take, for example, the "emissions trading" system the European Union imposed on its member nations to combat climate change. The Byzantine system imposes limits on the carbon dioxide that companies can emit -- thereby reducing one of the "greenhouse gases" that cause global warming.

Firms that are below the emission levels can sell their "leftover" emission credits to ones who spew out higher levels.

Despite its capitalistic veneer, mandatory emissions trading works like a manipulative tax, by raising the overhead of fossil fuel-intensive industries while giving less carbon-heavy sectors economic and political clout.

This seemingly obtuse process should concern everyone. Affected companies are forced to curtail production -- often by laying off workers. They must make changes to their business methods -- the costs of which are passed onto consumers in higher prices. Or they must slash profits to purchase emissions credits elsewhere -- thus depriving millions of middle-class shareholders of stock appreciations and dividends.

The EU's Phase 1 part of Kyoto Protocol compliance already has produced economic slowdowns, even though quotas on industrial carbon-dioxide emissions were set at relatively high levels.

Phase 2, scheduled for 2008, will force member countries to restrict further greenhouse gases -- forcing carbon-dioxide emissions down to the 1990 levels mandated by the 1997 treaty, which the United States never ratified because of bipartisan concern about its devastating economic impact.

While some see some economic suffering as a worthwhile trade-off for saving our planet, there is still no clear consensus on effective remedies for global warming. As far back as 1998, the National Center for Atmospheric Research estimated that implementing the Kyoto mandates would curtail global temperatures by as little as 7/100th of a degree by the year 2050.

That same year, Wharton Economic Forecasting Associates warned that ratifying Kyoto could lead to 2.4 million lost jobs in the United States and significant reductions in our Gross Domestic Product.

Only two months ago, two respected scientists in the prestigious journal *Environmental Geology* concluded that because natural forces are so much more important in shaping world temperatures, "attempts to alter the occurring global climactic changes" should be abandoned as "meaningless and harmful."

Unfortunately, we seem headed in another direction. A prominent British Labor Party politician recently suggested that someday soon Britons might have to carry "bank cards" that store both pounds and government-allotted carbon points. This Orwellian nightmare would subject every person's electricity use, driving habits and travel to monitoring and rationing by bureaucratic snoops. Those whose job-commuting distances increase or whose homes need more heat for health reasons, might not have enough carbon points -- or the money to buy more.

Such a future may not be too distant. In December the European Commission unveiled legislation that would gradually force airlines into EU emissions-trading -- prompting fears from discount operators that sizable carbon-dioxide fees may be added to passenger tickets.

What we don't know about global warming can hurt us, but so can what we mistakenly think we do know. For all the often-conflicting pronouncements and predictions from scientists and media about potential disasters, the looming regulations would soon cripple industrialized as well as emerging economies.

With nearly half of the world's population living on less than \$2 a day, we can't afford to stake the cure for global warming on a roll of the dice. Policy-makers shouldn't be allowed to gamble away our well-being by empowering careless government bureaucracies to run our lives.

[Contra Costa Times Editorial, Sunday, February 25, 2007](#)

California shows how to conserve energy

THE THREAT OF GLOBAL warming has risen to the level where more Americans are now understanding that we need to use fossil fuels more efficiently while we develop alternative sources of energy.

But even without potential global-warming disasters, there are several good reasons to use fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas more wisely.

The major source of these fuels is in the most unstable part of the world, where supplies could be severely reduced in a short time.

The cost of fossil fuels is skyrocketing as supplies fail to increase as fast as the rise in demand. Also, fossil fuels pollute the air and can cause health problems under certain atmospheric conditions.

So why haven't Americans done a better job of conserving a valuable resource? The answer seems to be that too many people believe that our quality of life cannot improve without an increase in energy use.

That mindset explains in large part why in the past three decades the average American has increased his and her energy use by 50 percent. That is a costly and unnecessary waste.

Fortunately, the huge increase in per-capita energy use has not occurred everywhere. In California, where living the good life is high on most people's agenda, per-capita energy use has not increased at all since 1974.

Moreover, carbon dioxide emissions per capita in California have fallen 30 percent since 1975. Nationwide, per capita carbon dioxide emissions have stayed the same.

Thanks to state regulations, high energy prices and greater awareness of the need for conservation, California uses less energy per capita than any other state in the country. We are more like Denmark than the rest of the United States.

A warmer climate helps Californians keep energy use for heating lower than average. But this state also experiences very hot weather in many areas, increasing the need for air conditioning, and has long commutes for many urban residents, boosting gasoline use.

If the state had not altered its pre-1974 trend toward increasing electricity consumption, today California would have needed the equivalent of a nuclear power plant every eight miles between San Diego and

San Francisco, according to physicist Arthur Rosenfeld.

Saving huge amounts of energy is not as difficult a task as one might think. Back in 1976, California was considering building a 1 billion watt nuclear power plant in Southern California. Gov. Jerry Brown wanted to find a way to stop construction of the plant.

Rosenfeld came up with the answer: refrigerators. He calculated that the state's refrigerators were using the equivalent of five such nuclear plants. The state adopted appliance efficiency standards and saved as much electricity as is produced by all the hydroelectric power plants in the nation.

California also wisely adopted an innovative utility regulation that decoupled utilities' profits from increasing sales. Utilities here are able to maintain constant profit margins even as Californians used electric power more efficiently. We are still the only state to have removed the link between utility profits and higher energy use.

This state also has taken a lead in promoting solar and wind power and has the largest wind power operations in the nation.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger also deserves credit for making California one of the few states to establish energy caps that call for increased efforts to use energy more efficiently.

The development of consumer-friendly hybrid cars, more efficient appliances, stringent rules on home insulation, solar power rebates and using natural gas instead of electricity promise to keep California in the lead in curbing energy consumption.

But it is not enough for California to go it alone. This state is proof that the rest of the nation can cut energy consumption significantly without suffering a loss in one's quality of life.

If the entire country had done what California has accomplished in the past three decades, we would not be as dependent on foreign oil or creating nearly as much carbon dioxide as we do now. It is past time for the rest of the nation to catch up.

[Tri-Valley Herald Editorial, Saturday, Feb. 24, 2007:](#)

California sets standard for energy conservation

WE SEE so many things wrong with California - health insurance, high cost of housing, deteriorating infrastructure, crime, silly legislation, the Raiders - now comes a report that says this state leads the nation in energy conservation. Could this be true? Have we really learned to conserve energy better than anyone in the country?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes this claim, and has the numbers to back it up. In fact, the panel says California serves as a model for other states seeking a similar path to energy reduction. Wow.

The panel concluded that since 1974 California has held its per capita energy consumption essentially constant while energy use per person across the United States has jumped 50 percent overall. While the average American burns 12,000 kilowatt-hours a year of electricity, the average Californian burns less than 7,000.

Believe it or not, California is cutting its contributions to global warming - carbon dioxide emissions per capita in California have fallen 30 percent since 1975 while the U.S. overall has remained flat. And with a push from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the state will further curb automobile pollution, increase the use of solar energy and cap greenhouse gases in the future.

True, California has some advantages. Our climate is mild compared to much of the nation (can you hear us, Buffalo?), high-tech industry doesn't use as much power to operate as heavy industry.

Then again, more people are moving here and using more total electricity - about 1 percent more electricity a year. But the study notes our trend of electricity consumption changed after 1974 and, if it weren't for conservation and hindsight, today we would need a nuclear plant every eight miles between San Diego and San Francisco.

So what's really going on? Is this the same smog-infested, gas-guzzling, light-sucking state we've all

grown to know? Apparently, a few looks at our PG&E bills and those frustrating trips to the gas station have made us all think twice. It's not the environment, stupid! It's our pocketbooks. According to the report, Californians are spending about \$800 a year less on energy than it did without efficiency improvements over the past 20 years. As Chris Cooper, director of the Network for New Energy Choices, said, "cost drives conservation."

The funny thing is we have learned to not only cope with energy conservation, we've made it part of our daily lives. We turn off lights in parts of our homes, make sure the computer is off before we leave, turn the heat down in the winter and open windows in the summer. When it comes to energy conservation, California is a trend-setter after all.

[Tracy Press Editorial, Friday, February 23, 2007](#)

Editorial: 'Hey Martha, McCain is a greenie'

It was one of those "Hey Martha" moments in the 2008 presidential campaign Wednesday at the Port of Long Beach. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., dipped himself in the vat of green environmentalism. Not just his big toe, but his entire body.

The conservative is a Teddy Roosevelt conservationist, or at least his Web site says that he is. McCain sounded like a conservationist when, standing with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, he pledged to make California's global warming fight the model for a national effort to curb greenhouse gases.

He said, if elected president, he would push for the adoption of low carbon standards in vehicle fuels to reduce pollution blamed for climate change. Schwarzenegger's January executive order for cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 10 percent by 2020, however, is being challenged by legislative Democrats as not stringent enough. They want half of all California cars using low-emission fuels by 2020.

McCain also endorses the Global Warming Solutions Act. The state law approved in 2006 requires California to cut total greenhouse gas pollution by 25 percent, also by 2020. It offers a free-market solution of paying for your environmental sins rather than state regulations and punishments. For example, industries can pay for exemptions from emission standards with "carbon credits" that they would buy from businesses that are out-performing the state compliance standards. A similar program has been successful in improving California's air quality.

McCain displayed his greenness when he told reporters, "My friends, the debate over climate change should be over. Climate change is taking place and it is largely due to human activity. ... Time is not on our side. We must act."

McCain's embrace of the global-warming agenda leaves American voters with one question: While on the long road to the White House, will his environmental green tint fade? If McCain is true to his word, it won't.

[OpEd in the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007:](#)

Sparks are flying

State leaders need to dial down rhetoric on greenhouse emissions.

When California enacted landmark legislation last year to combat global warming, it seemed like a love fest for state leaders who helped pass the bill -- Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez and Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata.

But appearances can be deceptive. Behind the facade, these leaders harbored deep differences on how California should reduce its greenhouse emissions, and how quickly. Those differences came to the fore last week.

The fireworks started when Perata held a press conference Thursday to unveil a package of eight Senate bills to reduce carbon dioxide, methane and other gases linked to global warming.

Perata said the bills would help California move quickly to meet goals of last year's Assembly Bill 32 -- which calls for a 25% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020 -- while also reducing diesel soot and other pollution that is endangering Californians now.

The Senate package included some strong elements, including a bill to create incentives for smarter

regional planning, thus reducing car trips and vehicle emissions. Other bills called for stronger renewable energy standards; further pollution reductions at state ports and new standards for cars and fuels sold in the state.

Perata, however, didn't spend much time consulting with the Schwarzenegger administration or Núñez's office on these ideas. Núñez, whose Assembly members are working on their own bills, was noticeably lukewarm. Schwarzenegger was more fiery, suggesting that Perata was undermining last year's compromise.

"We cannot abandon AB 32 just seven weeks after it became law," the governor said in a statement.

Everyone who participated in last year's talks agreed that follow-up legislation might be needed. AB 32 made clear that "market mechanisms" could be used to reduce emissions -- in other words, one company could reduce its emissions beyond 25% and then sell credits to another company. But it also recognized that development of a market trading system could take years, and that other methods could be used -- including traditional regulations.

Schwarzenegger and Perata need to take a chill pill before issuing more statements.

At the press conference, Perata made market trading of greenhouse gases sound like an Enron scheme, even though many environmentalists and economists support it. While there are many hurdles in developing an effective market trading system, Perata doesn't help by demonizing the concept.

Arguably, implementation of AB 32 will be one of the state's most crucial challenges in coming years. If we succeed, California will create a model for others to emulate. If we fail, either by failing to reduce emissions or driving businesses out of the state, it will set back the cause of fighting global warming on a worldwide scale.

[OpEd in the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007:](#)

Now here's a bright idea ...

Using compact fluorescent light bulbs in the 1980s and 1990s was considered a dim investment. These early bulbs flickered and buzzed and sent a cold light through the room. They took seconds to brighten and were so oddly shaped they didn't work in many fixtures.

Consumers swore they would never buy another CFL bulb. That's a shame. Like computers, cell phones and low-flush toilets, CFL bulbs have changed dramatically. Now these energy-efficient bulbs possess the power to revolutionize the world.

Consider this: CFL bulbs consume about 80% less energy than a standard 60-watt incandescent bulb, while producing the same amount of light. There are 110 million households in America. If everyone replaced just one standard bulb with a longer-lasting \$3 compact fluorescent bulb, it would save enough energy to close down (or avoid building) two giant power plants. It would reduce the greenhouse gases sent to the atmosphere by the equivalent of taking 1.3 million cars off the road.

There's already a revolution in light bulb conversion, The magazine Fast Company reported last year that Wal-Mart has teamed up with General Electric to manufacture and market CFL bulbs on a monumental scale. Wal-Mart hopes to sell a compact fluorescent to every one of its 100 million customers.

A coalition that includes Environmental Defense, Yahoo, Wal-Mart and others unveiled a Web site -- [green.yahoo.com](#) -- that tracks sales of compact fluorescents. As of Thursday, U.S. consumers had purchased 12 million CFL bulbs this year, including nearly 1.7 million in California.

Fresno residents purchased more than 52,000 bulbs so far this year, saving an estimated \$1.8 million in energy and 9 million pounds of planet-warming carbon dioxide.

Two California' legislators want to ban the sales of incandescent bulbs. These goofy proposals are unnecessary. The market is retiring the incandescent bulb -- a bright idea if there ever was one.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007:](#)

Bay Area must lobby for transportation funds

Column by Tim Hunt

THE Bay Area and the Valley have a few more days to raise heck and lobby the California Transportation Commission to make sensible decisions at its meeting Wednesday in Irvine.

The commissions staff apparently forgot that reducing congestion was the goal of the first big pot of bond money from last Novembers nearly \$20 billion set of transportation bonds. It was supposed to do so on an aggressive timeline.

The commission staff received recommendations from regional transportation agencies, such as the Metropolitan Transportation Commission that covers the nine-county Bay Area, as well as from the states transportation agency, Caltrans.

Two weeks ago, the staff released recommendations that are remarkable for avoiding the states most congested areas.

The commission staff set aside full funding for a bypass around Willits along Highway 101, while substantially reducing the recommended money from both Caltrans and MTC for Interstate 580 in the Livermore Valley. The Livermore Valley section of I-580 was slashed from the \$200 million recommended by the county to just \$60 million.

Thats along the corridor that boasts the second and third worst-congested (afternoon and morning) commutes in the entire Bay Area.

Frankly, with 85 percent of all of the congestion in Northern California within the nine Bay Area counties, you have to wonder just what the geniuses on the commission staff were thinking.

The commission staff recommended that the fourth bore of the Caldecott Tunnel receive all of the money sought. Thats a project that is a high priority for Contra Costa County, but wasnt even on the Alameda County list.

Fortunately, its up to the commissioners to finally approve the recommendations.

Alameda County has done a good job, in recent months, of speaking with one voice, but its time for the Port-to-Port Coalition to speak loudly and clearly.

The coalition focuses on truck traffic and commuters between the Port of Oakland and the Port of Stockton in San Joaquin County along Interstate 5, Interstate 205, Interstate 580, Highway 238 and Interstate 880. The mixture of commuters and truck traffic makes that route crucial to the Northern California economy.

Giving it short shrift makes no sense politically or practically.

Call your mayor and your supervisor and urge them to lobby hard for common sense to prevail over whatever is passing for logic on the transportation commission staff. Maybe they had funny cookies for lunch that day.

This is only the first round in the struggle to get the Bay Area an appropriate share of the bond money.

Theres another \$2 billion pot of bond money for freight movement and inter-regional corridors.

The twin ports of San Pedro and Long Beach want all of that money and will have persuasive arguments for it. The air pollution, truck congestion and rail issues surrounding the two ports are daunting. And those yards handle nearly 45 percent of the total container shipments into the United States.

Oakland is a major port, but its a tiny sack of concrete up against the San Pedro/Long Beach shipload.

The Port-to-Port coalition has a different set of challenges than the SoCal ports, suffering roads that are at least equally congested because of the commute element.

The I-580 corridor is a key connection for the port and also mixes in the trucks handling retail distribution from warehouses in San Joaquin County and commuters.

Bay Area elected and business leaders need to again step forward with a united voice to demand an appropriate share of this next pot of money. If they dont, it will be way too easy for the Southern California interests to scoop it all up.

Tim Hunt is the former editor and associate publisher of the Tri-Valley Herald. He can be contacted at tim-hunt2@comcast.net.

[Los Angeles Times, Commentary, Sunday, Feb. 25, 2007:](#)

Give L.A. a free ride

Eliminating subway and bus fares could put local mass transit on the road to success.

By D. Malcolm Carson

CLOSE TO HALF the travel time on most L.A. bus routes is spent at the curb. Bus riders know the frustration of waiting to board while someone coaxes a floppy dollar bill into the fare box. Likewise, plenty of irritated local drivers have been stuck behind that bus in the right-turn lane. Oh, and the despair of the train rider left struggling with an uncooperative ticket vending machine as the train pulls away.

So what would happen if, instead of hiking MTA fares as is currently under consideration, we made all the buses and subways free?

Eliminating transit fares is the logical flip side to the anti-congestion pricing schemes so favored by economists. London, for instance, charges a daily fee equal to about \$15.60 to drive in the traffic-choked central city between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays. Just as such fees on cars supposedly discourage driving, eliminating fares could encourage public transit use.

A one-way fare that's only \$1.25 may not seem to be a big factor in someone's transit decisions. But I wouldn't be so sure. The costs of owning a car — buying, fixing, registering and insuring it — have to be paid in advance, regardless of how much we drive. For the millions of Angelenos barely scraping by, another \$40 or \$50 a month on transit can be a significant disincentive. Angelenos don't have to look far for an example of how sensitive transit use is to price. In the early 1980s, L.A. voters approved Proposition A, a half-cent sales tax tied to a drop in bus fares from 85 cents to 50 cents for three years. During this period, mass transit ridership in the county rose 40%, reversing a decades-long decline. Today, there are nearly 1.5 million bus and rail boardings every weekday. That's 482 million car-free trips a year.

Axing fares would lift a drag on the whole transit system. People could quickly get on or off buses at the front and back. Bus drivers could focus on being helpful, as opposed to being fare cops. New riders could give it a try without worrying about having "exact change." The ease and accessibility of a free system might even instill a feeling of "fun" to riding transit — not an insignificant factor in a city where people famously love to drive.

The host of tangential benefits may ultimately prove even more important than reducing traffic — such as [better air quality](#), fewer greenhouse gas emissions and reduced oil dependence. Free transit also would provide a small measure of much-needed economic assistance to the urban poor.

So how would we pay for it? Keep in mind that the \$270 million the Metropolitan Transportation Authority collects in fares each year covers only a fraction of the agency's annual operating and maintenance costs. So it really comes down to a policy decision about how much of the cost of public transit should be subsidized.

A countywide sales tax of just one-quarter of one percent would cover the entire amount. In addition, there would be cost savings. The MTA wouldn't need to buy or maintain fare collection equipment. Faster bus travel times would translate into lower labor and fuel costs.

Unfortunately, the professionals, politicians and developers who normally make transportation policy are unlikely to support such a solution — one that promises no major construction contracts, high-profile ribbon-cutting ceremonies or lucrative real estate opportunities. It will be up to the public to demand and then support real solutions to our traffic woes.

D. MALCOLM CARSON, an attorney and urban planner in private practice, is a member of the Los Angeles Board of Transportation Commissioners.

[Letter in the Fresno Bee, Monday, Feb. 26, 2007:](#)

Let farmers go back to smudge pots for freeze

I have been following the plight of all the various people and businesses impacted by the freeze damage to our Valley fruit crop. After watching the farmers' attempts to raise temperatures by burning some type of recycled trimmings, I thought back to the days when the growers used smudge pots, a much more effective method of raising temperatures in fruit groves during a freeze period.

This method was outlawed by our representatives in the name of improving our air quality, without real discussion of the true financial impact, as witnessed recently: billions in lost fruit, how many millions in lost wages from farm labor and other downstream workers, and how many millions in aid to out-of-work farm laborers.

I refuse to believe that allowing the farmers to use smudge pots for the short duration of the last freeze would result in the massive losses we are now dealing with. This is farming country. Support our farmers, don't place more and more restrictions on them under the false pretense of improving air quality.

Darrell Bain, Clovis

[Los Angeles Times, Letter to the Editor, Monday, Feb. 26, 2007:](#)

Mixed-use zoning in downtown L.A.

In City Council District 9, which has a large portion of the city's industrial land, industrial jobs have been declining for decades for reasons that have nothing to do with zoning.

As the center of the region's public transportation system, downtown is the logical place for sustainable growth that allows people to live and work without adding to congestion or air pollution. The availability of public transit downtown provides no benefit to industrial uses. Furthermore, the wages for industrial jobs in Southeast Los Angeles are nowhere near those assumed by city planners; many of these jobs are in the garment industry in facilities just a few notches above the label "sweatshop."

We have an opportunity to create mixed-use development that would provide better-paying jobs and more housing at all income levels. The city could develop downtown zoning and design guidelines that allow for mixed-use projects that combine low- or no-impact industrial uses (such as garment factories) with residential uses.

By requiring a certain percentage of industrial square footage on lower floors and residential above, the city may actually achieve a net gain in industrial square footage because the residential uses could help such projects pencil out. This is actually the more sensible use of restrictive zoning than that which The Times believes should be implemented.

COUNCILWOMAN JAN PERRY
9th District, Los Angeles