

Transportation fund fight pits Valley, Bay against mighty L.A.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau
Fresno Bee, Wed., Nov. 28, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- Los Angeles and Inland Empire lawmakers lost a bid Tuesday to secure an overwhelming majority of \$2 billion in voter-approved transportation bond money -- a move that could have siphoned funds from the Central Valley.

Ignoring a plea by Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, the California Transportation Commission approved guidelines that would split the money more evenly. But Núñez, a Los Angeles Democrat, vowed to "work vigorously" to get a bigger share when lawmakers dole out the money during state budget deliberations.

The money comes from Proposition 1B, the \$19.9 billion transportation bond approved by voters last year. The \$2 billion was set aside to ease trucking, rail and port congestion statewide. The commission also agreed to tack on \$1 billion in other money, including from federal funds that aren't yet guaranteed.

Of the \$3 billion, the Los Angeles/Inland Empire trade corridor still would get up to \$1.7 billion, or 56% of the money. Núñez and other lawmakers demanded more, saying the region's ports handle more than 85% of the container traffic entering and leaving the state.

The San Francisco Bay/Central Valley corridor would get as much as \$840 million, or 27%. The two regions, teaming up in a rare alliance, succeeded in thwarting the move by powerful Los Angeles politicians to secure most of the money. San Diego officials also lobbied against the Los Angeles demand.

"In this case, it seemed politically expedient to have allies," said Barbara Goodwin, executive director of the Council of Fresno County Governments.

But the Fresno area does not stand to get any of the money. Rather, San Joaquin Valley planners agreed to go after money for five projects in the northern and southern ends of the region, including rail expansion through the Tehachapi Pass.

Fresno-area projects, such as expanding Highway 180, did not have a good chance of getting money under the program, which focuses on "trade corridors of national significance," said Tony Boren, deputy director of the council of governments, Fresno County's lead transportation planning agency.

Highway 99 is the Valley's main trade route. But the highway already is getting a \$1 billion earmark from Prop. 1B, so it is doubtful that the commission would have approved more money, Valley officials said.

The spending guidelines approved by the transportation commission merely set a framework for spending. Individual projects still must be approved. To alter the spending, it would take a two-thirds vote of the Legislature.

The commission Tuesday also approved an amendment stating that projects must be proven to improve air quality. For example, a rail project might reduce the amount of pollution-spewing trucks on the road. Environmentalists fought hard for the language.

"This money must be used on projects that simultaneously improve goods movement mobility and reduce air pollution," said Kathryn Phillips, of the national nonprofit Environmental Defense. "The two are not exclusive."

Panel says air quality should not be sacrificed for road projects

By SAMANTHA YOUNG Associated Press Writer

SF Chronicle, Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers Tues., Nov. 27, 2007

SACRAMENTO—State authorities said Tuesday that highway, rail and port improvements funded through a voter-approved transportation bond must not worsen air pollution.

The 8-1 vote by the California Transportation Commission marked a reversal by the panel and the Schwarzenegger administration in deciding how to spend \$2 billion in bond funds.

The nine-member panel also refused a request by Southern California lawmakers to steer the vast majority of the money to projects there.

The commission's new guidelines will shape how and where to spend about 10 percent of the \$20 billion transportation bond voters approved last year to fix roads, clear freeway bottlenecks and help reduce transportation-related air pollution.

"We all want to work together to ensure we haven't damaged the environment," commission chairman James Ghielmetti said after the vote.

Environmental groups, local air districts and residents of port communities worried the panel would weaken the air quality standards included in the transportation bond. They feared new construction could make the state's smoggy skies even worse without any pollution controls. Their concern was prompted by a commission decision earlier this month to eliminate air quality as part of the state's initial review of projects to be funded from the transportation bond.

"We're asking you ensure that all communities get protected," said Cynthia Marvin, a transportation expert at the state Air Resources Board.

The commission and state Business, Transportation and Housing Secretary Dale Bonner had argued that the state had no real way to gauge the effect of new construction on air quality when they are first proposed.

Commissioners, who are appointed by Schwarzenegger, reversed their decision after more than a week of closed-door negotiations led by Bonner and more than three hours of public testimony Tuesday.

"It wasn't that we wanted to lower the standard," Ghielmetti said. "The fear was it was going to get in the way of moving projects through quickly."

The guidelines adopted Tuesday will provide a uniform method for screening construction projects to determine their effects on local and regional air quality.

For example, a rail line proposal that would send containers through the Sierra Nevada might receive bond money if it reduces the number of freight trucks using Interstate 80 and employs technology to reduce emissions from trains.

In a snub to Southern California lawmakers, commissioners said 60 percent of the money targeted for trade improvements would go to the five county Los Angeles-Inland Empire region.

State Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez and 34 other Assembly members had asked the commission to steer at least 75 percent of the trade money to the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura. They said the five-county region handles 85

percent of the container traffic coming in and out of the state and is home to 82 percent of Californians. The Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex is the nation's busiest.

"The proposal before you shortchanges the neediest areas of the state when it comes to goods movement," said Nunez, D-Los Angeles, "This in my view is not only unacceptable, but if the guidelines are adopted, I guarantee you we're going to have a problem."

Nunez said he would change the formula the commission adopted Tuesday in the state budget next year.

Wood heat is warming, but polluting

By JAMES DAMSCHRODER

The Union Democrat (Sonora), Tuesday, November 27, 2007

There's something heartwarming about cozying up to a large, roaring fire as the chill of winter begins to sweep across Calaveras and Tuolumne counties.

It can be romantic and relaxing. But it can also be bad for your health.

During a normal wood burning season, wood smoke can account for as much as 80 percent of particulate matter pollution in residential areas, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Particulate matter is the most serious pollution we know," said Gennet Paauwe, spokeswoman for the California Environmental Protection Agency. "We take it very seriously."

Wood stoves are a popular means of heating in Calaveras and Tuolumne counties because of an abundance of cheap wood and the rising prices of natural gas and propane. But the money saved might not be worth the health risks.

According to the American Lung Association, studies have shown that wood smoke can be as bad or worse than cigarette smoke.

"When you're getting constant exposure to wood smoke, it can cause lung disease, and it's been linked to heart attacks and strokes," said Jenny Bard, assistant director of communications and advocacy for the California American Lung Association based in the Bay Area.

At present, there are no restrictions on wood burning in Calaveras or Tuolumne counties.

Thirty percent of people in Calaveras County rely on wood for their primary source of heat, said Lakhmir Grewal, Calaveras County's air pollution control officer.

Grewal said that someday the state could regulate or promote installation of cleaner burning wood stoves or alternative heat sources.

"There would be exceptions," Grewal added. "If you can't afford it, we're not going to put you out in the cold."

Tuolumne County Public Health Officer Dr. Todd Stolp said that many problems occur because of old, unmaintained stoves.

"Be sure the wood stove is in good shape," Stolp said. "Make sure the seals are holding and the smoke is going up the chimney."

He added that every year a kid gets burned because he or she isn't protected from the hot stove.

If you are using a wood stove, the EPA advises to replace all those manufactured before 1988. Wood stoves manufactured since 1988 must be EPA certified. These stoves use one-third less wood and emit 50 to 60 percent less air pollution, according to the EPA.

Also, burning clean, dry seasoned hard wood will reduce smoke and provide the most heat.

The first region in California to adopt wood burning restrictions was the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which covers eight counties in the Central Valley.

"About one-third of our residential particulate matter pollution comes from wood burning," said Anthony Presto, spokesman for San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "On the worst days, 24 tons of particulate matter pollution is emitted."

Many areas in California have, or are presently considering, following San Joaquin Valley's lead. Beginning Dec. 1, Sacramento residents will have to adhere to wood burning restrictions during the winter months. Also, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, which encompasses nine area counties, is proposing similar restrictions.

"Children with lungs still developing can be the most affected," the American Lung Association's Bard said. "They're breathing faster so they take in more air pollution. What goes in stays there."

EPA finishes soil and air testing in Coalinga, results next year

By Jenny McGill

The Coalinga Record, Tuesday, November 27, 2007

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency completed soil and air sampling work at a portion of the Atlas and Coalinga Asbestos Mines Superfund Sites in Coalinga this month.

"Sampling is done and we won't get results for three or four months," said Wendy Chavez, of the EPA.

The EPA will then decide if any additional cleanup work needs to be done, after the results are received, Chavez said.

In October, the EPA collected soil samples in Coalinga along West Elm Avenue south of Pacific Street and north and south of the underground waste management unit, which was built during the original cleanup to store asbestos contaminated material. The agency also took samples in four separate areas of city property for background comparison.

The testing area was divided into 100-by-100 foot grids with samples taken from the areas.

This month, some areas where soil samples were collected were raked to produce small, localized dust clouds. Technicians wore personal air samplers to measure any asbestos released into the breathing zone from the disturbed soil.

As part of the Superfund process, the EPA conducted a five-year review in 2006 of the Coalinga Asbestos Mine site cleanup. The review reported that the cleanup standard for asbestos in soil had changed, and recommended the EPA sample soil and air to determine that the cleanup continues to protect human health and the environment.

In the early 1990s, the EPA conducted a cleanup of a 107-acre parcel adjacent to West Elm Avenue and south of Highway 33 where asbestos from the Atlas and Coalinga asbestos mines was processed and shipped. Approximately 2,000 yards of asbestos, chromium and nickel-contaminated soil and building debris was evacuated from the surface of the site and consolidated into an on-site underground waste management unit. One-percent asbestos in the soil was set as the cleanup level for the site. The waste management unit is fenced, posted and maintained by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control.

Now, the EPA has determined that instead of the 1 percent soil level, risk-based, site-specific cleanup levels need to be developed for each site. The five-year review in 2006 of the Coalinga site recommended that an evaluation be conducted to determine whether the Coalinga cleanup

was still safe for human health and the environment.

More information about the cleanup in Coalinga or at the Atlas and Coalinga Asbestos Mines Superfund Sites is available at www.epa.gov/region09/waste/sfund/superfundsites.html. Site information is also available at the Coalinga District Library, 305 N. Fourth St.

Supervisors hand out remaining millions

BY JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 21, 2007

County supervisors put their last \$10 million of unexpected, mid-budget year money into roads and salaries Tuesday.

And they did it with very little fuss and muss.

The process, which started with \$17.9 million more than a month ago, took three meetings and hours of discussion to complete.

But supervisors took less than a half-hour to knock out the work on Tuesday.

They spent the money this way:

- \$4.4 million for road resurfacing.
- \$2.1 million as seed money for bonds to build new freeways.
- \$3.1 million to offset costs of higher staff salaries in various county departments.
- \$315,159 for drainage and street improvements in Lost Hills.
- \$295,848 for maintenance of Sheriff's Department aircraft.

County budget staff will come back at a future meeting to confront the question of whether the county of Kern should float a major bond issue to fund construction of major infrastructure such as roads and replacement fire stations.

Driving green

Supervisors also approved a new vehicle fleet policy Tuesday that pushes county staffers to buy the cleanest, most fuel-efficient vehicles they possibly can.

"We can make a significant impact on the carbon footprint we leave every day in this county," said Supervisor Michael Rubio.

County staff will also investigate the state of the county vehicle fleet over the next months to find the number of "gross polluters."

Rubio asked for the information in the hope that the county can seek grants to replace those vehicles.

Martinez firm accused of tampering with monitors at gas stations

The Associated Press
In the Bakersfield Californian, OC Register and Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2007

State and local authorities are accusing a Martinez petroleum company and two of its affiliates of tampering with monitoring devices at gas stations across the state.

A 50 million dollar lawsuit against Martinez-based Golden Gate Petroleum claims the company and its affiliates disabled monitoring devices that would help prevent gasoline leakage at 39 gas stations in the state.

The suit - filed by California Attorney General Jerry Brown, the State Water Resources Control Board and a number of district attorneys from several California counties - comes after a two-year investigation.

The complaint accuses Golden Gate Petroleum of violations including inoperable or missing line leak detectors, liquid and debris in the secondary containment, failure to perform monitoring within the required time period and alarm failure.

An attorney for says the suit is not over any leaks or spills, but over rather violations involving the monitoring equipment.

Bay Area could get \$640 million to ease truck traffic

Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, November 28, 2007

Sacramento -- State transportation officials agreed Tuesday to a plan that could give the Bay Area as much as \$640 million to ease truck traffic by improving the rail system and building projects such as truck lanes on highways - despite a threat by Los Angeles lawmakers to stall the deal.

The California Transportation Commission approved a set of guidelines that will determine how much the Bay Area and other regions of the state get from the pot of \$2.5 billion in bond funds designated to ease traffic from trucks hauling goods around the state. Specific improvements could include improvements to the Port of Oakland, Northern California rail lines and truck climbing lanes over the Altamont Pass.

But Los Angeles-area legislators, led by Democratic Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, threatened to interfere with the commission's plans to allot the voter-approved transportation bond money unless Los Angeles gets a bigger share.

Núñez said the guidelines shortchange the greater Los Angeles region.

"If these guidelines are adopted, you're going to have problems with how we reconcile our differences in the Legislature," Núñez said.

In Northern California, the money would be used to build a number of rail and highway projects in the Bay Area, Central Valley and beyond - possibly including taller rail tunnels over Donner Summit to allow trains to haul more containers, a new cargo terminal and street crossing at the Port of Oakland and truck-only lanes up the Altamont Pass on Interstate 580. Specific projects won't be selected by the commission until April.

Despite the Los Angeles threat, the commission voted 8-1, with Larry Zarian opposed for unrelated reasons, to proceed with the planned funding guidelines. If the state is able to secure \$500 million in federal funds for goods movements, or raise it through future port fees, the pot would be raised to a little more than \$3 billion and the Bay Area share would climb to \$840 million.

Tuesday's meeting, attended by about 150 people, was a key step in determining what projects will eventually be built. The commission set guidelines for choosing projects, including targets for roughly how much each region of the state will receive. It also agreed to consider air quality as a factor in deciding projects that eventually receive funding.

Officials from the Los Angeles and Inland Empire regions of Southern California argued that because the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach handle 80 to 85 percent of the international cargo coming into the state, their region should get 80 to 85 percent of the bond money that is specifically allocated to improving the movement of goods. Proposition 1B, approved by voters last year, dedicated \$20 billion in bond money for improving the transportation system by beefing up public transit and building new carpool lanes, interchanges and wider highways, among other projects.

The spending targets would give Los Angeles about 55 to 60 percent of the available money set aside for easing truck traffic.

"The voters expected the bond funds would be targeted to areas of the most need in the state, and that was the legislative intent," Núñez said. "The proposal before you shortchanges the neediest areas of the state."

The speaker denied that his efforts constituted "some kind of power grab from L.A.," saying the region suffers daily from the traffic and air pollution generated by trucks from the ports. He called the spending targets unacceptable and unfair and accused the commission of politicizing the bond process.

While state voters approved the infrastructure bonds, and the Transportation Commission is assigned to determine how transportation bond funds are spent, all appropriations of money must go through the Legislature and the state budget process.

After the commission's vote, Chairman Jim Ghielmetti of Pleasanton said he fears that pressure from Núñez and four other Los Angeles and Inland Empire Assembly members could taint the process.

"The intent of the Legislature was to put it in the hands of the (Transportation Commission) so that it wouldn't become political," he said. "Personally, I think we did the right thing. We're not trying to play favorites."

NorCal to get up to \$840M for freight Panel ignores Assembly speaker's plea for more funds to be diverted south

By Erik N. Nelson, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, November 28, 2007

Ignoring a warning from one of the state's most powerful politicians, the California Transportation Commission approved a funding formula Tuesday that would allocate as much as \$840 million to improve freight transportation corridors serving the Bay Area and Northern California.

State Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, urged the panel to allow more money for Southern California in its funding formula for the \$2 billion Trade Corridors Improvement Fund. Voters approved the fund a year ago as part of the \$20 billion Proposition 1B bond measure.

Meeting Nunez' demand would have left a smaller percentage for Northern California.

The commission vote also boosts the fund to as high as \$3 billion, first with \$500 million in gas tax receipts and then with the more uncertain prospect of proposed container fees and new federal funding.

The guidelines give a range of \$640 million to \$840 million, or 26-28 percent, to Northern California, where Sacramento, San Joaquin Valley and Bay Area officials banded together to lobby for a menu of \$857 million in projects.

The list includes a \$325 million truck-train terminal at the Port of Oakland and \$315 million worth of improvements to Union Pacific tracks between Richmond and Martinez, each to be half privately funded, along with opening rail tunnels through Donner Pass to allow double-stacked container cars.

Five Southern California counties, whose officials showed up in force at Tuesday's meeting to ask for 70 percent to 85 percent of the funding, are eligible for \$1.5 billion to \$1.7 billion, or 56 percent to 60 percent.

San Diego, with its port and border crossing with Mexico, could get \$250 million to \$400 million.

"I was pleased that we didn't have 85 percent of the money going to Los Angeles," said Assemblyman Jim Beall, D-San Jose, after the vote. He told the commission that giving a huge percentage to the Los Angeles/Inland Empire freight corridor would alienate other parts of the state and hurt the chances of passing future infrastructure bond measures.

Officials from Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties argued that 85 percent of the state's cargo containers come through Southern California through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, thus they're entitled to that much from the trade corridors program. Northern California officials argued that the big ports down south are largely for imports from overseas, while the Port of Oakland boosts the state's economy with tech goods exported from Silicon Valley, farm products from the Central Valley and wine from Napa and Sonoma counties.

While Nunez vowed in a statement to give that corridor, which serves the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, "the honest treatment it deserves," Beall expressed confidence that the Bay Area's legislators could preserve the funding.

One of the advantages enjoyed by the Bay Area is that the state transportation commission's membership is almost devoid of members from the Los Angeles area. Three members from the Bay Area, including chairman James Ghielmetti of San Francisco, and two other Northern California members combine to make up a majority on the nine-member commission.

Larry Zarian of Glendale was the only vote against the trade corridor guidelines.

Ghielmetti said the staff recommendation was the fairest result of two days of negotiations between all the regions and state officials.

"We did our work and tried not to politicize it," Ghielmetti said. "Now it looks like it's going to get politicized."

Commissioners also heard from a sizable delegation of environmental advocates. They convinced the panel to require that trade corridor projects don't contribute to [air pollution](#) in local neighborhoods such as West Oakland, which suffers from [particulate smog](#) from diesel truck and locomotive engines serving the Port of Oakland.

Fight looms over transit bonds' proposed spending

By Ed Mendel, UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER
San Diego Union-Tribune, Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2007

SACRAMENTO - Los Angeles was the loser and San Diego was among the winners yesterday as the California Transportation Commission approved guidelines for allocating \$2 billion in transportation bonds.

But the battle is far from over.

A full-blown power struggle has erupted over part of a \$19.9 billion transportation bond approved by voters in November 2006 that provides money to improve freight corridors, particularly around ports.

The commission of governor's appointees voted 8-1 for a split that could give the San Diego area up to \$400 million, despite opposition from Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, who was not satisfied with about four times that much for his area.

A cabinet-level official of the Schwarzenegger administration had tried to avoid a regional battle by adding \$1 billion to the \$2 billion in bond funds - \$500 million from gasoline tax revenue and another \$500 million of uncertain origin.

But the powerful Assembly speaker, backed by a bipartisan letter from 35 legislators in the five-county Los Angeles area, said the twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach - the busiest in the nation - handle 85 percent of the cargo containers entering California.

"The proposal before you shortchanges the neediest areas of the state when it comes to goods movement," Núñez told the commission.

The speaker said he told state Business, Transportation and Housing Secretary Dale Bonner that the Los Angeles area would settle for less than 85 percent of the bond funds.

But Núñez said the state's traditional 60-40 transportation fund split between Southern and Northern California should not apply because of the heavy traffic at the ports.

"\$1.5 billion out of \$2 billion for this five-county region makes a lot of sense to me," Núñez said. "Anything short of that doesn't."

The commission uses the guidelines to select projects, but the money must be appropriated by the Legislature.

Bonner faced a battle on another front when the commission, fearing project delays, voted Nov. 5 to remove a provision from the proposed guidelines that required projects receiving the bond money to reduce air pollution.

The commission voted yesterday to restore the provision after Bonner was assured that the state Air Resources Board could help quickly work out a way with environmental groups to screen projects for air-pollution reduction that will not delay the application process.

The \$19.9 billion bond contains \$1 billion for air-quality improvement. The commission was told that the Air Resources Board will allocate the funds to clean up polluting equipment rather than improve roads.

Some commission members said more money should be spent on "grade separation" - building bypasses at the intersection between railroads and streets and highways so vehicles don't have to wait while long trains roll slowly through crossings.

San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders, county Supervisor Greg Cox and San Diego Councilman Jim Madaffer backed the guidelines, which could give the region \$250 million to \$400 million.

The San Diego Association of Governments, which wanted \$500 million, is seeking bond money for a second border crossing at Otay Mesa, improvements to state Route 905, another rail line from the border to downtown and improved truck routes from the 10th Avenue port terminal.

"This plan fairly emphasizes all - and I want to emphasize all - of the major trade corridors throughout the state," Sanders said, urging approval of the guidelines.

Mission statement to focus on L.A. traffic

By Rick Orlov and Kerry Cavanaugh, Staff Writers
LA Daily News Tues., Nov. 27, 2007

The problem with traffic in Los Angeles is everyone talks about it, but nothing seems to get done. Little fixes like left-turn lanes and synchronized signals provide some relief. But no long-term plan has emerged to solve the problem of too many cars going to the same places on too few lanes.

"We are never going to solve our transportation crisis with a single project," Councilwoman Wendy Greuel said. "We need a comprehensive policy, with benchmarks, to hold the city accountable. Right now... if you ask anyone where the city is going, no one knows." Greuel chairs the City Council's Transportation Commission, scheduled today to approve a mission statement laying out the city's goals and plan to reach them. The commission will then pass it on to the full City Council.

"We need to get people out of their cars, but no one knows the best way to do that," Greuel said. "And, when we go to Sacramento or Washington for money, they always ask us, 'How will this be used?' They want to see a seamless approach to how we deal with traffic." Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who has made transit one of his top issues, fully supports Greuel's efforts, aides said.

Developed by the city Department of Transportation, the mission statement lays the foundation for future studies to fill in the details over the next 18 months about how people can get around the city more quickly and in a more environmentally friendly way.

"This strategic transportation plan, would be more like a road map and a blueprint to meet objectives and goals - hopefully in a very deliberate and systematic way to make sure we are making really good solid investments," said Jay Kim, a planner in the city Department of Transportation.

The statement has six main goals. They are to emphasize environmental issues by reducing emissions, protect neighborhoods, increase mobility and accessibility, ensure safety, promote the city as a center for international trade and develop a stable funding source.

In the past, Kim said, the city and other agencies have been more concerned with pursuing transit dollars, without any plan in place on how to spend the money.

"The process has been, we drop everything as we look for new projects or round up the old ones and everyone scampers at the last minute," Kim said. "What we're saying is it could have been more helpful if we had a citywide priorities list."

Also, he said, the goals often change as new politicians take office. "If you come up with solid principles and policies, they should endure those political landscape changes," Kim said.

Transportation planners believe the shift will demand changes by commuters and local businesses.

"We need to get more people into mass transit," Kim said. "We need to manage the demands of people driving to work with flexible hours, car pools and ride-sharing."

To start the process, Greuel has put up a survey on her City Council web page, www.lacity.org/council/cd2, that will be made available to other council members. The survey will be used to help guide a consultant who will develop the final plan over the course of the next several months.

[Modesto Bee Guest Commentary, Wednesday, November 28, 2007](#)

Don't they get it? Warming is important

By FRANK DAVIES - McCLATCHY-TRIBUNE

Climate change transforms an election campaign. Extreme weather and water restrictions galvanize voters. Both political parties scramble to propose mandatory limits on carbon emissions.

That's happening now, but not in the United States. It's Australia.

There, the impact of global warming shook up a national election as climate change was a major factor in Saturday's defeat of longtime Prime Minister John Howard.

In the United States, "going green" is more than a slogan for presidential candidates, but it's not yet a top-tier issue. That could change soon. California, with its delegate-rich Feb. 5 primary, is a state where global warming could rise to the top.

Some candidates are offering detailed plans, but few talk about making hard choices and sacrifices. And if the planet is in peril, as the latest U.N. science report says, it's hard to convince

voters of consequences that seem distant and are too complicated to cover in sound bites. To many, the Iraq war, health-care costs and economic fears are more urgent concerns.

"Global warming is so complex, with many layers and nuances," said David Rothkopf, an energy and trade official in the Clinton administration. "It's a challenge for the candidates and the political media."

At a first presidential forum ever on the issue in Los Angeles on Nov. 17, Hillary Clinton warned activists: "When I talk to audiences about the need for energy independence, people cheer. When I talk about global warming, people sit there. For many people, the case has not yet been made."

The media are partly to blame, say environmentalists. At that forum, sponsored by the League of Conservation Voters and others, a writer for the online environmental magazine Grist noted that Tim Russert has interviewed candidates 16 times on "Meet the Press." He's asked about 300 questions, but not one about climate change.

Republican John McCain, campaigning in Sacramento, said: "This is an important issue. I don't think it has been discussed enough in the debates on either side."

That might be changing. Next month in New Hampshire, two leaders on climate change with undeniable star power -- Al Gore and Gov. Schwarzenegger -- will try to lure candidates of both parties to an energy and climate forum.

The "Albert and Arnold" tandem will probably do better than the green groups that invited all contenders to the Los Angeles forum. Only three, all Democrats, showed up -- Clinton, John Edwards and Dennis Kucinich.

So far, only Democrats favor aggressive action, including government-ordered reductions, to curb greenhouse-gas emissions. Most Democrats favor a target of 80 percent reductions by 2050, sharp increases in fuel-efficiency standards and a bigger investment in renewable fuels.

Most Republicans are skeptical of government mandates to reduce carbon emissions. Some who trail the front-runners, such as Fred Thompson, Ron Paul and Tom Tancredo, question the scientific consensus that human activity is causing climate change.

Mitt Romney, like most Republicans, stresses the need for energy independence as a security issue. On climate change, he wants China and India to do more before considering U.S. mandates. The exception is McCain, who has long supported a cap-and-trade plan and higher vehicle fuel efficiency.

Clinton made a subtle appeal to Californians by telling them she often cites the state's efficiency rules as a model when discussing the issue. Obama reminds audiences that his proposed national fuel standard is similar to California's.

[Tri-Valley Herald Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, November 27, 2007](#)

Using bond money for sustainable technology is good

I am writing in response to Shaun Bishop's recent article, "Sequoia high school district seeks \$165 million bond."

As a student at Woodside High School, part of the Sequoia Union High School district, I was pleased to read of the district's intentions for the funds if the bond passes. Having attended public school since kindergarten, I have witnessed many construction and improvement endeavors accomplished by the means of bonds, some more necessary than others.

The district's plan of implementing improved energy efficiency and installing solar panels couldn't be more valuable. The drawback of the measure is that property owners will have to pay around \$9.73 per \$100,000 assessed property value. Such a fee may sound hefty for something going towards schools, but the benefits of the bond's applications are universal. Installing solar panels

and energy-efficient fixtures will cut down on the carbon emissions resulting from the high schools in the district. This will not only create a better environment for students and faculty, but for everyone.

Woodside alone has almost 2,000 students, and if we begin using more energy-efficient practices, it can lessen our impact upon the environment. The sustainable technology will eventually pay for itself in lower electricity use.

The passing of this bond is not only key to improving learning environments but also vital to helping the environment and promoting sustainable practices within the community.

Allison McElwee - Woodside

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the regulation in 9 counties of commercial charcoal grills used in restaurants as a measure to reduce pollutants in the air. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Nueve condados de California controlarán el humo incluso de asadores de carne

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, November 27, 2007

Por lo menos nueve condados de California tendrán que regular el humo que generan los asadores comerciales de restaurantes, como medida para reducir la contaminación del aire.

De acuerdo con la Oficina Administrativa Distrital de Calidad del Aire, del área de la Bahía de San Francisco, las cadenas de restaurantes que venden asados usan carbón, uno de los peores contaminantes.

La directora de esa institución, Johnnise Foster dijo que es una buena propuesta y que los restauranteros deberán sustituir el carbón por algún otro tipo de tecnología.

Según el reglamento actual, cada restaurante puede asar, por ejemplo, tres mil 200 libras de carne al mes en promedio.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the air quality workshops that will be held between California and Baja California, Mexico, led by the Border Environmental Justice and the Supreme Court of Mexico. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Suprema Corte de México encabezará taller de justicia ambiental fronteriza

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, November 28, 2007

La Suprema Corte de Justicia de México informó hoy que encabezará a partir de mañana un taller sobre justicia ambiental en la frontera entre California y Baja California.

Esta es la Primera Jornada de Derecho Ambiental y, de acuerdo con el coordinador, Mariano Esparza, el encuentro busca analizar en mesas de trabajo problemas ambientales comunes en la frontera, y encontrar propuestas para soluciones.

Lo diferente de estos talleres es que contemplan las posibilidades desde el punto de vista legal, y las propuestas serán muy específicas para presentarse a autoridades que corresponda abordarlas en la zona limítrofe

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses global warming and the effects it has due to the high pollutant emissions in the air. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Calentamiento global, llanto de la Tierra

Enfermedades, incendios, inundaciones y plagas a cuenta de la contaminación

Claudia Núñez

La Opinion, Sunday, November 25, 2007

Los médicos que examinaban el cuadro de hemorragia interna y la intensa fiebre que presentaba una mujer de 28 años en la sala de emergencias de un hospital en Monterey, California, no daban crédito al diagnóstico: dengue hemorrágico, una enfermedad que fue erradicada de California en 1922 y que únicamente se transmite por el piquete de un mosquito (*aedes aegypti*).

Era julio de 2005 y la paciente murió a los pocos días de haber llegado al hospital. Dos meses después, el 29 de agosto, el huracán Katrina, el sexto más fuerte que ha vivido Norteamérica, tocó tierra en la costa de Louisiana, dejó bajo el agua la ciudad de New Orleans y cobró la vida de 1,836 personas.

Para el común de la población, lo sucedido en California y en Louisiana no guarda relación alguna. Sin embargo, para los científicos, ambos sucesos reflejan el rostro del más catastrófico fenómeno al que se enfrenta la Tierra: el calentamiento global.

"Fue todo repentino. Vimos inundaciones en algunas regiones y sequías graves en otras. Proliferaron los casos de asma por la contaminación, de cáncer en la piel por los fuertes rayos de sol y detectamos pacientes con males peligrosos como el dengue, en regiones de California y de Texas que no eran aptas para este mal. Sabíamos que teníamos un problema ambiental, pero ese año presenciamos sus primeros y más drásticos efectos", dijo Hamlet Paoletti, portavoz del Consejo para la Defensa de Recursos Naturales (NRDC).

Los científicos determinaron que el aumento de la temperatura que vivió la Tierra durante 2005 produjo la rápida evaporación en los trópicos y originó intensas lluvias y destructivas inundaciones y, entre otros males, favoreció la formación del huracán Katrina, el más devastador en la historia de EU y la proliferación de numerosos mosquitos portadores del dengue.

"En los últimos 200 años hemos cambiado las características del planeta, de tal manera que el clima se ha vuelto una caja de Pandora", explicó el investigador Ernesto Franco, de la Universidad Estatal de California en Monterey

La acumulación de gases tóxicos producidos por el hombre y por la naturaleza ha formado a lo largo de los años una gruesa capa en la atmósfera, que atrapa el calor del sol y causa que el planeta se recaliente.

A este fenómeno, que se le ha bautizado como "calentamiento global", se le atribuye hoy la muerte de más de 160 mil personas al año y la discapacidad de casi seis millones de personas en todo el mundo, según la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS).

Estos cambios no tienen retroceso, y lo peor es que van en aumento. "El problema es que no se ha logrado estabilizar la emisión de bióxido de carbono a la atmósfera, sigue en aumento y es un aumento importante", dijo Franco.

Muestra de ello es que han pasado más de dos años desde el huracán Katrina y las tragedias parecen repetirse.

Los rostros desesperados de personas buscando a sus familiares en medio de inundaciones o de incendios avivados por las sequías han vuelto a ser noticia.

Tabasco es hoy el espejo de Katrina. Los fuertes rayos del sol ecuatorial y la erosión por la tala inmoderada de la selva se sumaron para provocar intensas lluvias a destiempo, que hicieron desaparecer poblados enteros bajo el agua.

A principios de 2007, científicos mexicanos ya pronosticaban esta tragedia.

"El aumento de la temperatura de la Tierra provocará problemas muy importantes. Veremos incrementada fuertemente la precipitación pluvial, lo que podría sepultar a poblaciones enteras.

La zona más afectada será la del golfo sur, básicamente Campeche y el centro de Tabasco.

"La zona de Villahermosa posiblemente tendrá que ser reubicada por la penetración del agua", declaró en enero Luis Manuel Guerra, presidente del Instituto Autónomo de Investigaciones Ecológicas (Inaine) en México.

Pero mientras Tabasco perecía entre las aguas, a millas de distancia el fuego, alimentado por ocho años de intensas sequías, consumía gran parte del Sur de California.

La escasez de lluvia en el Sur de California ha hecho avanzar el desierto en forma rápida, alrededor de cuatro kilómetros por año, dicen expertos.

En noviembre, para muchas familias era una tradición visitar pueblos como Lake Arrowhead, en las montañas de San Bernardino, y jugar con las primeras nieves del año; sin embargo, hoy hasta esos detalles han sido borrados.

Con temperaturas aún en los 70 grados, en menos de cuatro años esta localidad ha sido arrasada en dos ocasiones por descomunales incendios. Casi la tercera parte de sus bosques se han perdido por la presencia de insectos que proliferan incubados por el calor y el lago que hay en el corazón de esta ciudad. Presentan niveles de erosión nunca antes vistos.

"La nieve en cuanto toca el suelo se deshace. En los años 90 llegamos a registrar hasta siete pulgadas de nieve, ahora difícilmente se ven los parches blancos en esta región", explicó Jossie Huston, residente y ambientalista del área de Lake Arrowhead.

"Allá, dice Huston mientras apunta hacia una comunidad que se divisa a lo lejos, era tanta la población de árboles que no podías ni ver las casas. Ahora, muchos árboles han desaparecido y otros, aunque siguen en pie, están muertos por los insectos".

Y es que la escasez de lluvia no sólo atrajo las llamas a California. En septiembre, el Departamento de Agricultura lanzó una alerta ante la invasión de millones de hormigas rojas carnívoras presentes en los condados de Los Ángeles, Riverside, San Bernardino y el Valle Central. Una plaga sin precedente e inusual en este estado que ya ha provocado la muerte de especies típicas de estas regiones, la destrucción de cultivos y ha llevado a decenas de personas a los hospitales con síntomas de intoxicación por el piquete de este insecto.

"Los árboles están secos y no pueden luchar contra las plagas y menos todavía contra plagas que no son típicas de estas regiones. Mucha gente desconoce que los insectos han resultado aun más mortales [para la vegetación] que los incendios", explicó Franco.

Pero el peligro no sólo está en las montañas, los residentes de las bahías de California han sido testigos de marejadas inusuales en los últimos años.

Se agota el tiempo

La elevación de la temperatura hace derretir los glaciares y placas de hielo polar que, a su vez, han aumentado el nivel del mar.

"Cuando se habla de calentamiento global, las personas visualizan al pobre oso polar muriendo solitario en el Ártico que se deshace con el calor, pero no se dan cuenta de que en California también lo vamos a sentir, tal vez en forma de un tsunami", dicen los científicos.

Además, debido a la contaminación ambiental, más de un millón de niños han sido diagnosticados asmáticos en los condados de Los Ángeles, Riverside, Orange y San Bernardino.

"Me da miedo sentir que me ahogo", dice Ángel Cervantes quien con escasos 11 años de edad, sabe de primera mano los efectos de la cortina de humo que envuelve su casa en la comunidad de Boyle Heights.

Pero, ¿serán las inundaciones de Tabasco, las plagas, la sequía de California o la expansión del dengue las últimas tragedias de este año? Nadie lo puede predecir. Sin embargo, un hecho queda claro entre la comunidad de investigadores: "En los próximos años el planeta sufrirá más desastres naturales y las crecientes emisiones de gases de invernadero ponen a la Tierra peligrosamente cerca de un drástico cambio climático que puede salirse de control", advierte James Hansen, director del Instituto Goddard de Estudios Especiales de la Oficina Nacional de Aeronáutica y el Espacio (NASA).

Para muchos, la solución está aún en nuestras manos, pero el tiempo corre y puede que pronto no haya marcha atrás.

Los científicos predicen que quedan en promedio 10 años para poner en práctica energéticas medidas que permitan detener las emisiones de gases tóxicos. Estados Unidos juega el papel más importante en este rol, dice el sistema de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático (IPCC).

Este país, aunque solamente representa 4% de la población mundial, produce 25% de la contaminación por emisión de bióxido de carbono de todo el mundo, es decir, emite más bióxido de carbono que China, India y Japón juntos.

Estudios prospectivos señalan que en 2025, si las tendencias no cambian, el impacto del calentamiento global será el de verdaderas catástrofes de proporciones históricas. Sin embargo, de hacerse todo lo necesario, aunque ya no pueda revertirse la presencia del calentamiento global, podría haber una recuperación que permitiría a los seres vivos adaptarse a la nueva situación.

"Muchas personas ven el medio ambiente como algo de la naturaleza, del clima, pero no, el medio ambiente es todo lo que nos rodea, las escuelas a las que van nuestros hijos, lo que comemos, lo que vestimos. Necesitamos abrir los ojos y darnos cuenta de que mejorar el medio ambiente es también cambiar nuestra actitud", dijo Kathleen Rogers, presidenta de Earth Day Network, con sede en Washington

Mientras hay cambios, la Tierra y la salud seguirán en riesgo.

Con las lluvias en Tabasco, los médicos ya esperan que el dengue y otras enfermedades poco comunes en esta época del año comiencen a proliferar. Ya pasó hace dos años y una mujer en California, a millas de distancia de las zonas inundadas, perdió la vida. Entonces, ¿cuánto tiempo le queda a la humanidad para tomar conciencia?