

Judge leans in favor of county in West Park suit

By Tim Moran

Modesto Bee, Thursday, December 18, 2008

A Fresno County Superior Court judge signaled Tuesday he's inclined to agree with Stanislaus County that the massive West Park business park doesn't need an environmental impact report -- for now.

West Park developers are proposing a 4,800-acre business and industrial park southeast of Patterson, which would include an inland port and a short-haul railroad linking the development to the Port of Oakland.

Patterson sued the county in May, contending that the county Board of Supervisors' approval of a memorandum of understanding amounted to an approval of the project and required the environmental report before the vote.

Patterson officials say the additional trains through the city would cause public safety problems by delaying emergency vehicles. It would also cause additional air pollution and traffic problems, they say.

The lawsuit was moved to Fresno to avoid conflicts of interest with local judges.

In a tentative ruling Tuesday, Judge Tyler D. Tharpe said the county memorandum did not constitute a project under the California Environmental Quality Act. A final ruling is expected by the middle of next week and the judge could reverse the tentative ruling. He heard arguments from both sides after issuing the tentative decision.

The county argued that the memorandum was not a commitment to the West Park project. County staff as well as the five-member Board of Supervisors said at the time that the agreement was nonbinding, according to County Counsel John Doering.

City: Circumstances make the case

The purpose of preparing the memorandum, Doering said, was to determine if the project was feasible and to describe the project in enough detail to proceed with the environmental review.

Patterson argued that events before and after the memorandum was approved show that the agreement was a binding commitment. City attorney George Logan pointed Wednesday to the county's application for state funding for the short-haul rail system as proof of a commitment to the project.

In the meantime, the county has started the environmental review process for West Park. A preliminary report could be published by next summer.

What the judge's final ruling will mean is unclear.

Attorneys for the county and West Park feel that if the judge rules that the memorandum is not a project subject to the environmental review, that ends Patterson's lawsuit.

Logan, however, contends that the circumstances around the memorandum also constitute a commitment to the project that would require the review. The city could pursue the lawsuit on that basis, he said.

If the judge rules for Patterson, the memorandum would be thrown out, but the environmental review would continue, according to Doering, and would have little effect on the process.

Logan contends that such a ruling would mean that the county would have to re-do everything it's done since West Park was chosen as the developer.

If the lawsuit continues beyond next week, a hearing on the merits of the case is scheduled for the end of January.

Proposed GWF project aims to curb Co2

By Eiji Yamashita
Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2008

Fewer emissions. Less water usage. And more power.

That's the concept GWF Energy is selling to state regulators as the company seeks to convert the existing power plant in Hanford's industrial park to a so-called "combined-cycle" plant. Through the conversion, GWF wants to capture heat that is usually released into the atmosphere -- with it, some greenhouse gases and an ozone precursor -- in the operation of gas turbines and turn it into steam to produce more electricity. The company has a similar plan for its Henrietta plant near the Lemoore Naval Air Station.

Both projects must be approved by the California Energy Commission and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District.

On Tuesday, company officials presented an overview of their plans to Hanford city leaders in an informational session. Although the project would not require city approval, it would affect the city. While the project could mean more property tax revenues and reduced air pollution, it could also mean an increase, however slight, in water use.

GWF says the proposal is part of its greening effort.

"Because of this push toward renewable energy and because those types of energy don't generate all the time and are somewhat unpredictable, it's our view that the backbone of the system will still have a fossil fuel component," said Doug Wheeler, GWF vice president. "So that fossil fuel component needs to be as efficient as we can possibly achieve. That's where this combined-cycle technology comes in."

The \$110 million project will install new technology that would remove the waste heat from the first cycle and let it go through a boiler to generate steam that turns a second set of turbines, allowing the facility to generate an extra 25 megawatts, according to the California Energy Commission. The existing Hanford plant has a capacity to generate 95 megawatts, providing energy to about 95,000 homes.

According to GWF, the combined-cycle conversion would cut the greenhouse emission from the Hanford plant by half, from 6 parts per million to 3 ppm, and reduce the nitrogen oxide emission by about 30 percent, from 3.6 ppm to 2.5 ppm.

The plant will use a dry cooling system, minimizing the increased water use at 8 acre feet per year. That's a far more efficient option compared with a conventional cooling water system, which would use 425 acre feet of water each year, GWF says.

City leaders' reaction to GWF plans was favorable.

"I think they're trying to be environmentally efficient about it. What they are trying to do will also reduce the emissions, so it sounds like a win-win deal," said Mayor David Ayers. "They seem to be sensitive to the fact that there isn't much water out there by using the air-cooling method to minimize the water usage. That also makes it a good project. I have no qualms about it."

The conversion would also provide the plant with flexibility, Wheeler said.

The retrofit would allow the plant to run through an energy-efficient combined cycle when electricity needs are predictable. But in an emergency situation requiring a quick supply of megawatts, the plant could still run in a simple cycle, which takes much less time to generate power, Wheeler said.

GWF Hanford is called a "peaker plant" that runs only when there is a high demand for electricity. That usually occurs during summer months when the air conditioning load is high and during the holiday season when consumers put a strain on the power grid by cranking up the heat and plugging in the Christmas lights. In a typical year, the Hanford plant runs about 1,500 hours a year.

The permit application for GWF's latest proposal, filed recently with the energy commission, is expected to be processed within a year.

If everything goes well, construction could start in early 2011, with a goal of starting operation of the combined-cycle plant in 2012, company officials said.

Residents protest landfill

Kettleman City group disrupts meeting

By REBECCA PLEVIN / Vida En El Valle

Vida en el Valle Wednesday, December 17, 2008

HANFORD -- Miguel Alatorre and Gloria Preciado are fed up with efforts to expand one hazardous waste landfill in Kettleman City and construct another one.

"It seems like we're just being dumped on and dumped on every single time," said Alatorre, 14, of the group Kids Protecting our Planet.

"We are fighting for our lives, for our kids, for our families, for everybody," said Preciado, a Kettleman City resident. "Our life is in danger all the time."

Alatorre and Preciado were among 60 Kettleman City residents who marched into the Kings County Board of Supervisors chambers last Thursday night chanting, "¿Qué queremos? ¡Justicia! ¿Cuándo? Ahora!" (What do we want? Justice! When? Now!).

The Local Assessment Committee was about to hold a meeting to discuss the landfill plans proposed for the small Kings County community, but the residents prevented the meeting from continuing as planned.

The residents proceeded up to the dais and stood behind the board members. Some residents took seats at the dais, and others held up signs that read, "Kettleman City is not your trash can," and "The county should protect Kettleman City."

Adults and children from Kettleman City traveled more than 30 miles to attend the LAC meeting in Hanford and to voice their concerns regarding the proposed landfill projects.

Residents spent about two hours criticizing the current LAC, demanding changes in the way the proposed landfill projects are reviewed, and lamenting the unsafe conditions caused by the existing landfills.

The residents encouraged the county to disband the current LAC. The current board is "illegal" because it does not include any Kettleman City community representatives, as required by state law, according to the residents. To emphasize their disapproval of the board members, the residents sang out "¡Que se vaya!" and chanted, "step down!"

Under state law, the LAC is charged with determining what additional benefits and considerations a community should receive in exchange for hosting a hazardous waste facility. The board does not have the authority to approve or reject the project.

The residents also requested that an extended summary of the environmental review documents be translated into Spanish, and that all LAC meetings be held in Kettleman City or Avenal, among other demands.

Kettleman City, which is home to about 1,499 people, 92.7 per cent of which are Latino, according to the U.S. Census, already hosts Kettleman Hills, a facility that processes, treats, and disposes of hazardous waste. The proposed project would add about 220 acres of new waste operations area to the current facility and would also add a new landfill to the site.

Many residents said they were sick of living in such unhealthy conditions. "¿Quién quiere tóxicos en la comunidad? Nadie!" (Who wants toxics in their community? No one!), the group cried out in unison.

"Whether their frustration is based on real issues or perceived issues, in the community's mind out there, there are some issues that need to be addressed, and we're willing to listen to them," Bill Zumwalt, director of the Kings County Community Development Agency, said in a phone interview Friday.

Regarding the residents' concern that the LAC board did not reflect the Kettleman City community, Zumwalt said there is a "disagreement between the group and the county as to what constitutes a community." The county, he said, believes "community" refers to the "greater Kings County area."

The Board of Supervisors selects the members of the LAC and Zumwalt said he did not think anyone from Kettleman City had applied to serve on the commission. "We'd be very happy if they had applied, but no one applied," he said.

Representatives from the organizations Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio/People for Clean Air and Water, Kids Protecting our Planet, and the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment will soon be submitting applications to serve on a new LAC, according to Bradley Angel, a Greenaction lawyer who is supporting Kettleman City's efforts.

"Those applications would be contingent on the county disbanding this illegal LAC and starting a lawful process," Angel said in a phone interview Monday. He said there is "no way that any of the folks from these organizations will participate as a one-person token on this illegal LAC."

Angel said the Kettleman City residents would also be reaching out to the Kings County Board of Supervisors for help, and would continue to ask Sen. Barbara Boxer and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to intervene on behalf of the residents.

The Kettleman City community "was really empowered" by the protest on Thursday night, Angel said. "The fight will most definitely continue."

Air district collects \$750,000 for violations

By Niesha Lofing

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, December 18, 2008

The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District has more money in its coffers thanks to a settlement and a legal action that were resolved this week.

The air district announced Wednesday that it reached a \$208,560 settlement with Kiewit Pacific Company over air quality violations in connection with a project the company was working on at Folsom Bridge, a district news release states.

The company, which specializes in construction, engineering and mining services, was cited for several violations, including operating two diesel-fueled engines powering stationary cranes for nearly a year without a permit. The engines didn't meet the district's "Best Available Control Technology" requirement for emission limits on internal combustion engines with more than 50 horsepower.

The settlement was reached through the district's mutual settlement program, which is designed to resolve violations without litigation.

The district also announced Wednesday that a jury awarded it \$742,885 in civil penalties in an enforcement action brought against Jerome Sprague, who owns a commercial building rented to the Sacramento Waldorf School in Fair Oaks.

The jury held that Sprague twice willfully and intentionally violated the district's asbestos removal regulations, resulting in asbestos emissions, a district news release states.

District staff documented violations for multiple days in winter and summer of 2000.

"When violators do not participate in the (mutual settlement process), the district has no choice but to pursue legal action awarding penalties, and we will do so whenever that course becomes necessary," said Larry Greene, the district's executive officer.

State regulators approve stricter air measures

Vida en el Valle Wednesday, December 17, 2008

SACRAMENTO -- In an effort to reduce diesel air pollution, California regulators adopted the nation's toughest rules on heavy duty trucks last Friday.

The state Air Resources Board, voting unanimously for the new measure, determined that the public health benefits of the initiative far outweighed the financial pain it could inflict on truck drivers.

"This is an industry that has an enormous impact on people's lives," said chairwoman Mary Nichols. "This regulation will save more than 9,000 lives and reduce the toxic emissions that cause cancer and birth defects."

The new regulations could have a positive effect on Latino communities, according to Nora Vargas, executive director of the Latino Issues Forum.

"It is well documented that Latinos and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by pollution due to their close proximity to facilities with high levels of emissions," said Vargas, who testified before the Air Resources Board.

College graduates needed

SACRAMENTO -- The number of college-educated workers in California grew significantly over the last two decades, but that pace is likely to slow because of the state's fast-changing demographics, a think tank recently reported.

According to the study, the growing Latino population in California is one factor that is likely to affect the slowing of growth in the number of college graduates. Latinos made up 29 percent of the working-age population in 2006, and that number is projected to be 40 percent by 2020.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell said California's educational spending and direction must be focused on the fast-growing Latino student population, which makes up 48 percent of the state's 6.3 million public school students.

"It's more critical than ever to have a well-skilled, educated, critical-thinking work force," O'Connell said. "That will come from the subgroups who continue to lag behind their peers."

O'Connell said one of the state Department of Education's top priorities will be getting more minority children through college.

New state air quality regulations threaten future of school busing

By Cheryl Lingo, Editor

Reedley Exponent Wednesday, December 17, 2008

The landmark Air Resources Board (ARB) ruling last week that sets in place new rules for diesel truck and bus emissions could have significant consequences for the local school district, including reduced bus routes and increased walking distances for students.

The ruling requires diesel trucks and buses to retrofit their rigs with smog controls or new engines to reduce particulate matter emissions, or get off the road.

In Kings Canyon Unified School District, that means coming up with additional money in order to comply with the new ruling.

Transportation Director John Clements said the ruling imposes a mandate on school districts that is not fully funded by the state.

"They're telling us we have to reduce emissions to clean up our air, but the state doesn't pay for what that effort costs," he said.

KCUSD has a fleet of 67 buses. All but 4 of its diesel powered school buses have been retrofitted with devices that reduce particulate matter (PM) by 25%, the Level I standard. Clements said the district has found premature engine wear with some of those retrofits, which has increased its maintenance costs.

Under the new rules announced this week, only 12 buses can be retrofitted to the higher Level III standard, which reduces PM by 85%. Funding for these new retrofit devices is expected from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Four pre-1977 buses are slated for replacement in the spring, funded by Prop 1B, but the district has about 30 buses, manufactured between 1983 and 1993, for which there are no retrofits or engine replacements, and no full funding available, according to Clements.

Clements said the ARB will pay \$113,000 for a diesel bus and \$140,000 for a compressed natural gas (CNG) or alternative fuel bus. The cost for clean air replacement buses needed in KCUSD is closer to \$175,000 for diesel and \$225,000 for CNG or alternative fuel buses.

In addition, Clements says the state now requires a \$25,000 match from school districts, leaving the district with an unreimbursed cost of up to \$100,000 for a single bus.

"KCUSD would potentially need to replace 30 school buses by 2018 under the ARB's new ruling," Clements said in a letter to the ARB. "Under the current state of our educational funding this does not appear to be an option unless there is full mandated funding or additional bond or grant funds for bus replacement."

Federal smog standards for this region have to be met by 2024, but by 2014 the region has to clean up soot and chemical debris known as particulate matter, or PM-2.5.

Clements said colleagues in southern California and in Sacramento have been forced to make cuts in their transportation programs, including extending walking distances for students and eliminating some routes.

"We all need clean air to breath, but some of my colleagues are wondering if this new ruling might be the demise of public school transportation," Clements said.

KCUSD is one of the largest school districts in the state in terms of geography, spanning nearly 600 square miles and transporting students from above snow level to the valley floor. Clements said KCUSD has been at the forefront of clean air school bus programs through the California Energy Commission, ARB and the San Joaquin Valley APCD. Those efforts qualified the district for more than \$5 million toward bus replacement and the district's compressed natural gas fueling station.

Calif. regulators to vote on San Diego power line

By ELLIOT SPAGAT, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, December 18, 2008

SAN DIEGO — San Diego Gas & Electric Co. says it must build a \$1.9 billion, 123-mile transmission line to harness solar, wind and underground heat from a distant desert.

Critics question if the high-voltage power line will ever deliver on its promise of providing renewable power from California's Imperial Valley to the nation's eighth-largest city. They say it will blight the mountain landscape with 150-foot towers and emphasize that ratepayers will pick up the tab.

Those views will clash Thursday when the California Public Utilities Commission meets in San Francisco to consider approving the power line. The PUC has held marathon public hearings since SDG&E asked permission to build the Sunrise Powerlink three years ago and it commissioned an 11,000-page report on its potential impact on the environment.

PUC President Michael Peevey, backed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, proposes that the five-member panel approve SDG&E's 500-kilovolt line, which would carry enough electricity for about 750,000 homes, or about half of the utility's customers.

Commissioner Dian Grueneich wants to condition approval on requirements to ensure the line is used for renewable energy. A PUC administrative law judge recommended commissioners reject the proposal.

SDG&E, a unit of San Diego-based Semptra Energy, dropped initial plans to cut 23 miles through the middle of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, a spot known for its hiking trails, wildflowers, palm groves, cacti and spectacular mountain views.

Thursday's vote comes as utilities nationwide are under pressure to rely less on coal and natural gas to fire their plants, the biggest source of carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S.

California's three investor-owned utilities are required to get 20 percent of power from renewables by the end of 2010. SDG&E is the biggest laggard, getting just 6 percent from renewables.

SDG&E would build the power line but buy the juice from a host of generating companies. The most ambitious generation project relies on a commercially untested technology for a gigantic solar plant.

Stirling Energy Systems Inc., a Phoenix startup, wants to build thousands of solar dishes, each four stories tall about 100 miles east of San Diego. The dishes, which collect sunlight to heat gas and drive the cylinders of an engine, have been tested on a small scale but would now need to move to mass production.

The PUC's vote is unlikely to be the final word.

If the line is rejected, SDG&E can ask the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to overrule the decision. A 2005 law gives the federal government authority to approve power lines in Southern California and other parts of the country deemed to need more transmission capacity.

A power line opponent, Michael Shames of Utility Consumers' Action Network, said the consumer advocacy group would ask a state court to block construction.

Feds again delay clean trucks fee at ports

Associated Press

O.C. Register, Thursday, December 18, 2008

LONG BEACH, Calif. (AP) – The Federal Maritime Commission is citing the slumping economy for again delaying collection of a \$35-per-container clean trucks program fee at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

Most of the estimated 16 million 20-foot equivalent containers handled at the ports each year would pay the fee, which is designed to pay for the replacement of 18,000 older polluting diesel trucks at the ports.

But the commission said Wednesday it needs more time to review the fee and it will continue blocking collection, saying the fee may cause a “substantially anti-competitive” business climate.

The fee was supposed to go into effect Oct. 1, but the commission has blocked it twice. Port authorities estimate they're losing up to \$1 million daily because of the delays.

Information from: Press-Telegram, <http://www.presstelegram.com>

Utah leases could be early issue for new Interior chief

Renee Schoof, McClatchy Newspapers

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, December 18, 2008

WASHINGTON — Environmental groups filed a lawsuit Wednesday to try to block the sale of oil and gas leases that the Bush administration plans for Friday on 110,000 acres of wide-open redrock country in Utah near Arches and Canyonlands national parks.

The suit says that the sale would result in oil wells, electricity lines and roads through wilderness that includes Desolation Canyon, one of the largest roadless areas in the Lower 48. The suit also argues that oil and gas development would make the air dirtier in the two national parks and Dinosaur National Monument, and also would harm Nine Mile Canyon, which contains archaeological sites and prehistoric rock art.

If the sale goes through as planned, a decision about whether the government should buy back the leases could hit the desk of President-elect Barack Obama's choice as secretary of the interior, Ken Salazar.

Salazar hasn't made his views public about the Utah lands. In the Senate, he's supported oil and gas development, but he's also supported various forms of environmental protection.

Mary Wilson, a spokeswoman for the Bureau of Land Management office in Utah, said the BLM found that 2.8 million acres in Utah had "wilderness characteristics" and decided to preserve wilderness on about half a million of those acres.

Wilson said that the National Park Service raised concerns about leases on 93 parcels, and that the BLM took 23 of them off Friday's offering as a result. She said the BLM satisfied the Park Service with stipulations about use of the other 70 parcels. The Park Service referred calls for comment to the BLM.

Sharon Buccino, a senior attorney on land issues for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the lease sale was illegal and that the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management rushed it through without proper care for natural and cultural protection.

The BLM announced the lease sale on the day of the presidential election and started a 30-day period when it would receive comments. The announcement said the sale was part of "a vital part of supplying our nation with reliable and affordable energy."

Actor Robert Redford, speaking via phone at a news conference in Washington, said he'd hiked and ridden horseback throughout the Utah lands that are up for sale through most of his life.

"There's no place like these lands," Redford said. "They're part of the human, American legacy."

Rep. Brian Baird, D-Wash., who grew up in Colorado not far from that part of Utah, said he was confident that President-elect Barack Obama wouldn't let the lease sale go forward.

Baird added, however: "We should not have to buy these parcels back. They should not be sold now or any time in the future."

The League of Conservation Voters, which endorsed Salazar's 2004 election to the Senate, gives him an 81 percent lifetime score.

He advocated a phased leasing approach for oil and gas leases on Colorado's Roan Plateau, arguing that a slower approach would better protect the environment and wildlife. The BLM held the full auction.

Salazar also has said that he supports "developing oil shale responsibly." He called for extending a moratorium on commercial development in Colorado to allow time for research.

NRDC president Frances Beinecke and other environmental leaders praised Obama's selection of Salazar. Tom Kiernan, president of the National Parks Conservation Association, said that Salazar's record on protecting the parks was strong and that they'd be "in great hands."

However, Kieran Suckling, director of the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, Ariz., said that Salazar was a disappointing choice with a mixed record on environmental issues. As examples, he said that Salazar twice voted against higher fuel efficiency standards for vehicles and, as Colorado attorney general, he supported Bush's choice of Gale Norton of Colorado as his first

interior secretary. She went on to clash frequently with environmentalists over national parks policies and oil and gas drilling.

Salazar's family lived in Santa Fe, N.M., before the American Revolution and later settled in the San Luis Valley of Colorado, where they have farmed and ranched the same land for five generations.

When he was growing up, his home had no phone or electricity. Salazar and his seven brothers and sisters were the first generation in their family to graduate from college.

In addition to farming, he and his wife owned and operated a Dairy Queen restaurant and radio stations. Salazar practiced law, focusing on water rights and environmental issues, and served as Colorado's director of natural resources and state attorney general before he was elected to the Senate in 2004.

INTERIOR ISSUES

Sage grouse: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must decide by May under order of U.S. District Judge B. Lynn Winmill whether to list sage grouse as an endangered species. If it does, it could restrict livestock grazing, energy development and activities across millions of acres of sagebrush steppe habitat in 11 Western states.

Global warming: The department must balance building wind, solar and geothermal energy plants on public lands with the protection of endangered species habitat.

Mining reform: Congress is preparing for a major effort to increase royalties for mining on public lands and to remove provisions that require agencies to issue permits to miners if they meet environmental standards.

Fire: Climate change has increased forest fires.

Water: Agriculture and salmon compete for water in the Pacific Northwest.

Indian issues: The interior secretary is the trustee for the nation's Indian tribes, who have fought in court for years to get royalties and other fees for oil, gas and mineral development on their land.

Wolves: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to remove wolves in the Northern Rockies from the endangered species list as early as this week, but the controversy is expected to return in the new administration.

Exxon Mobil slapped with \$6.1M pollution fine

By H. JOSEF HEBERT | The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Washington Post and other papers, Thursday, Dec. 18, 2008

The Exxon Mobil Corp. has agreed to pay an additional \$6.1 million penalty after it reneged on a promise to cut air pollution from four refineries in California, Louisiana and Texas, the Justice Department said Wednesday.

The payment stems from an agreement between the government and Exxon Mobil in 2005 - part of a broader push by Environmental Protection Agency to reduce air pollution from refineries - in which the company agreed to pay \$14.4 million in civil penalties and community-related environmental projects, while also installing new air pollution controls at the refineries.

But Justice and EPA officials said Wednesday that Exxon Mobil violated the agreement by not adequately reducing smokestack sulfur pollution at the refineries as it had promised to do.

Exxon Mobil said in a statement that the company itself identified the ongoing sulfur emission problem and brought the matter to the EPA's attention.

"Environmental impacts associated with this item were very minor," Prem Nair, a spokeswoman for Exxon Mobil's offices in Fairfax, Va., wrote in an e-mail. She said the emission problems have

been corrected and the company now meets the required EPA standard at the refineries in Beaumont and Baytown, Texas; Torrance, Calif., and Baton Rouge, La.

But the Justice Department saw the matter as a bit more serious.

"The Department of Justice will not tolerate violation of our consent decrees," Assistant Attorney General Ronald Tenpas said in a statement. "The significant penalty in this case shows that noncompliance with settlement requirements will have serious consequences."

Granta Y. Nakayama, assistant EPA administrator for enforcement and compliance, said the 2005 settlement "has resulted in major reductions in air emissions" from Exxon Mobil refineries "but we need full compliance to realize all the benefits of the settlement."

The 2005 agreement was one of a number of settlements that covered companies and refineries nationwide. To date, the EPA said, 95 refineries in 28 states, accounting for 86 percent of the country's refining capacity have installed additional emission controls as part of the 2005 settlement or agreements patterned on it.

At the time, Exxon Mobil denied it had violated any laws or clean air regulations but said the settlement was "in the best interest of the company and supports the continued trend of emission reductions" at its refineries.

As part of the settlement, Exxon Mobil originally paid a civil fine of \$7.7 million, promised to spend another \$6.7 million on community environmental improvements, and said it was installing additional pollution controls at six refineries. Its two refineries at Joliet, Ill., and Billings, Mont., while part of the original settlement, were not involved in the latest penalty.

In October, Exxon Mobil broke its own record for biggest U.S. quarterly profit, reporting earnings of \$14.83 billion for the July-September period. The previous mark was Exxon Mobil's \$11.68 billion profit in the second quarter of this year.

Environmental groups tell Obama to move fast on climate

Renee Schoof, McClatchy Newspapers
Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, December 18, 2008

WASHINGTON — Don't wait until the financial crisis is over to attack global warming because cleaner ways to produce and use energy will lead to a stronger economy, leaders of environmental groups said Tuesday as they outlined their wish list for President-elect Barack Obama.

The recommendations from 29 of the nation's most prominent environmental and conservation groups emphasized a clean-energy approach to economic revitalization but also included detailed suggestions for Alaska's Arctic region and for conserving land and water resources nationwide.

Leaders of the groups who helped develop the recommendations to Obama's transition advisers rejected the idea that fighting global warming and protecting the environment would be too expensive in an economic downturn.

"Our economy is suffering and so is our environment. The solutions to both go hand in hand," said Larry Schweiger of the National Wildlife Federation.

The country needs to reduce global warming emissions and protect its water, fisheries, forests and wildlife, which are all stressed by climate change, Schweiger said. He also said that environmental protection will affect the quality of life "for Americans everywhere for generations." And he argued that outdoor recreation creates many American jobs.

"The engines that drive our economy," he said, "are not only in Detroit."

Obama has set Congress the goal of passing a stimulus plan quickly so that he can sign it soon after taking office. The report said the stimulus plan was an opportunity to invest in things such as mass transit, renewable energy and weatherization — all of them sources of new jobs.

"There's economic opportunity if we do this right," said Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The report also argued that a green plan for the economy would "provide a path out of poverty and a more just society." It argued that many people can't afford some of today's more expensive global warming solutions — such as hybrid cars or solar panels. But it said that they'd benefit from new jobs and less pollution.

One of the biggest sources of jobs would be weatherizing homes and buildings to save energy, said Frances Beinecke, the director of the Natural Resources Defense Council. Studies show that about 40 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions are from wasted energy in buildings.

Knobloch said there also would be jobs in building a new grid to move electricity from solar and wind installations to cities.

"We have the last century's patchwork of antiquated technology" that wastes about a quarter of the energy from coal-fired power plants along the electricity transmission lines, he said.

A few of the recommendations in the nearly 400-page report:

- Pass a law in 2009 that sets up a sale of global-warming pollution permits and uses the money for clean energy, green jobs, consumer relief — especially for those most in need — and protection for vulnerable ecosystems.
- Grant California and other states a waiver under the Clean Air Act to enforce their own tougher standards for pollution from vehicles.
- Start a legal review of all Arctic-area Chukchi and Beaufort Sea oil and gas leases made during the Bush administration. Revoke, suspend or limit as many as legally possible to give time for an environmental review. Halt further planned lease sales in the Arctic Ocean, Bristol Bay and conservation priority areas of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska.

ON THE WEB

The full report, "Transition to Green," is available on a joint Web site of the 29 groups: www.saveourevironment.org

[Sacramento Bee, Guest Commentary, Thursday, December 18, 2008:](#)

Reflections from the region: A year of restraint for public officials

The following is from Kevin Hanley, a member of the Auburn City Council.

Gamblers can only see as far as the next roll of the dice. Even worse, too many elected officials have acted like "The Cincinnati Kid," risking the hard-earned dollars of the residents of the greater Sacramento region.

Lawmakers' shortsighted laws and tax policies have created costly burdens on businesses, farmers and ranchers, and encouraged a speculative housing boom while paving over farmlands, ushering in this destructive financial bust. The laws that stand in the way of preventing the predictable outbreak of catastrophic fires that spew tons of pollutants into our air and threaten our homes must be fixed.

Ideological policies have snarled simple road projects in red tape, emptied our water reservoirs, increased our dependence on foreign sources of energy, and created mind-boggling budget deficits. Like Gulliver, the hands of well-intentioned policymakers are often tied down by the epidemic of slavish devotion to special interests.

The lesson of 2008 is that we must ensure that federal, state and local governments reform themselves to focus on cost-effectively achieving their fundamental missions of protecting citizens' safety and security. Government shouldn't get distracted by trying to perform numerous minor functions that individuals and private associations can do for themselves.

From my experience working for the California Legislature, as an elected Auburn City Council member, and as chairman of the Greater Auburn Area Fire Safe Council – frustratingly dealing with a federal government that acts like an absentee landlord of public lands – it is clear that there are many areas for improvement to provide more practical solutions.

As the recession deepens, government officials in 2009 must examine every budget line item and enact creative reforms that result in superior performance, more transparency and accountability in all our operations. With this focus on mission, the greater Sacramento region will emerge stronger for the future.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Latinos Issues Forum leads on environmental issues in California. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Foro de Asuntos Latinos asume dirigencia ambientalista en California

Manuel Ocaño

Noticier Latino

Rado Bilingüe, Thursday, December 18, 2008

El Foro de Asuntos Latinos informó hoy que luego de impulsar dos medidas de protección y justicia ambientales en California, continuará su lucha contra la disparidad en la forma en que la contaminación afecta a las comunidades.

El foro impulsó nuevas restricciones contra camiones contaminantes y divulgó que la información ambiental de California sea totalmente bilingüe.

En comunicado de prensa la organización con sede en San Francisco informó que ahora se asegurará de que la aplicación de reglamentos no afecte en desproporción a las minorías étnicas.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses California will revise all products used in homes that pollute and will eliminate those that impose risks on human health and or the environment.](#)

Revisará California preventivamente contaminantes en todo artículo del hogar

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, December 17, 2008

California revisará preventivamente todo artículo del hogar que se use en el estado regularmente, para eliminar cualquier cosa que signifique riesgo para la salud humana o el ambiente.

Un nuevo reglamento de la Agencia de Protección Ambiental de California, la CalEPA, cambió las reglas.

Hasta ahora los análisis se hacían cuando los productos iban al basurero o causaban algún incidente; ahora el gobierno de California los revisará desde su diseño, su producción, su distribución y consumo.

El gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger dijo que la medida se adelanta a políticas nacionales y ubica nuevamente a California como líder en regular el uso doméstico (hogareño) de químicos.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Obama names Nobel Prize winner Steven Chu as Energy Secretary.](#)

Obama nombra al premio Nobel de Física Steven Chu como secretario de Energía

Staff Writer

Vivelo Hoy, Monday, December 15, 2008

Washington, 15 dic (EFE).- El presidente electo de EE.UU., Barack Obama, prometió hoy que el medio ambiente será una de las prioridades de su mandato al anunciar de modo oficial la selección del premio Nobel de Física Steven Chu como secretario de Energía.

Obama ofreció hoy una rueda de prensa en Chicago, la novena desde su triunfo en las elecciones del 4 de noviembre, para presentar parte de su equipo medioambiental. En este equipo figurará también Lisa Jackson al frente de la Agencia para Protección del Medio Ambiente(EPA), y Carol Browner, que será representante especial para energía y cambio climático.

Además, la hispana Nancy Sutley, teniente de alcalde en Los Ángeles, con competencias sobre el cuidado del medio ambiente, quedará al frente del Consejo para la Calidad Medioambiental de la Casa Blanca.

En la actualidad, Chu dirige el Laboratorio Nacional en la Universidad de Berkeley y es un importante partidario de la reducción de gases invernadero mediante el desarrollo de fuentes alternativas de energía.

Browner encabezó la EPA durante el mandato del presidente Bill Clinton (1993-2001) y es una estrecha colaboradora del ex vicepresidente y premio Nobel de la Paz Al Gore en materia de medio ambiente.

Por su parte, Jackson ha encabezado la agencia de medio ambiente del estado de Nueva Jersey, y se da la circunstancia de que Sutley, de origen argentino y que apoyó a la senadora Hillary Clinton durante el proceso de elecciones primarias, es la primera persona de carácter abiertamente homosexual nombrada para un cargo de importancia en el equipo de Gobierno de Obama.

Al anunciar los nombramientos, el presidente electo aseguró: "el futuro de nuestra economía y la seguridad nacional está ligado de modo inextricable a un desafío: la energía". Según el futuro mandatario, sus nombramientos están "dispuestos a reformar el Gobierno y a ayudar a transformar nuestra economía de modo que nuestra gente sea más próspera, nuestro país esté más seguro y nuestro planeta esté protegido".

La búsqueda de energías alternativas y la reducción de la dependencia del petróleo extranjero para atender las necesidades energéticas de EE.UU. serán claves para una política que buscará al mismo tiempo sacar a la economía de su crisis y reducir la emisión de gases invernadero.

De acuerdo con el que será el primer presidente negro de EE.UU., "no existe contradicción entre el crecimiento económico y prácticas sensatas en favor del medio ambiente". En su rueda de prensa, Obama también aludió al escándalo desatado la semana pasada tras la detención del gobernador de Illinois, Rod Blagojevich, acusado de buscar lucrarse con la adjudicación del escaño en el Senado de EE.UU. dejado vacante por el presidente electo.

La semana pasada, Obama, que asegura que ni él ni nadie en su equipo ha mantenido conversaciones indebidas con el gobernador, anunció una investigación interna sobre el asunto.

El director de Comunicaciones del equipo de transición, Dan Pfeiffer, afirmó hoy que esa investigación se ha completado y demuestra que no hubo ningún tipo de conversaciones "inapropiadas" entre el gobernador o sus representantes con personal del equipo de Obama.

El presidente electo aseguró hoy que la investigación, llevada a cabo por su abogado, Greg Craig, demuestra que él no mantuvo contacto directo con Blagojevich y que su personal no "hizo nada inapropiado".

Obama indicó que hará público el informe, pero los fiscales que llevan el caso le han pedido que lo aplase para no interferir con la investigación federal. Sin embargo, el presidente electo dio largas a la hora de responder si su jefe de Gabinete, Rahm Emanuel, había tratado con representantes del gobernador. La prensa estadounidense publicó la semana pasada que Emanuel transmitió a Blagojevich una lista de personas que podrían ocupar el escaño dejado libre por Obama.

