

'Spare the Air Day' is declared in Valley

Hanford Sentinel, Sept. 3, 2002

Because of high levels of air pollution across the San Joaquin Valley, Monday has been declared a "Spare the Air Day" by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The district asks that residents to work to cut down on air pollution by :

Carpooling when possible and avoiding non-essential vehicle trips.

Postponing yard work with gas-powered equipment.

Avoiding the used of products high in volatile organic compounds such as aerosol sprays, solvents, oil-based paints and charcoal lighter fluids.

Postponing the use of motor boats, personal watercraft and off-road vehicles.

Sunday, because of air pollution, had also been declared a Spare the Air Day by the district.

[Modesto Bee, Community Briefs, Sept. 1, 2002](#)

Spare the Air day declared

Today has been declared a Spare the Air day in all sections of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Officials advise caution when scheduling strenuous outdoor activities. Also, residents are asked to avoid unnecessary vehicle use.

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, Sept. 1, 2002:](#)

The heat's always on at Valley's year-round schools

By Margaret Clark
Fresno

One cannot pick up the Opinion page lately without reading a letter complaining that it's too hot for Fresno's children to be starting school this time of the year. Surely it was an oversight not to remember that for a large number of Fresno's children, year-round school means that they go to school all of June, all of July and all of August. This includes the children with respiratory conditions such as asthma, too.

So many people in this community forget that there are more than a few year-round schools doing their jobs despite the temperatures outside. Teachers and administrators at these schools have alternative plans for keeping the children inside when the heat is excessive, and provide quiet activities in the shade while the classroom teacher takes a lunch.

The cafeterias at these schools are "cooled" with swamp coolers, which are very ineffective once the temperature reaches 100 degrees. Somehow, in spite of it all, learning must take place to meet the state standards and for these children to be competitive with all other children, whether they attend year-round schools or not.

Maybe the school board will decide to go back to a Labor Day start for the school year, but that will only help some of the children. The solution for the rest of the children is to build more schools so that year-round schools are a thing of the past.

Staying on track

High-speed rail bond measure moves to governor's desk.

Fresno Bee, *August 31, 2002*

High-speed rail for California is picking up momentum thanks to Sen. Jim Costa, D-Fresno. Costa engineered legislative passage for a proposed \$10 billion bond measure -- aimed at the November 2004 ballot -- asking voters to put the fast trains on track. We hope they will. The need is becoming increasingly urgent. Freeways are choking with more and more cars, air quality is getting worse and the future of much of the airline industry is becoming more clouded.

Building a high-speed rail system would be a good investment in California's future. The new trains and railbeds the bond measure would pay for would mean speeds of more than 200 mph on the longest stretches. Travel times between the Bay Area and Los Angeles would be cut dramatically, and every trainload of passengers would mean less traffic and cleaner air.

Sept. 11 demonstrated how dangerous it is to have all our long-distance transportation eggs in the air travel basket. When travel time to and from airports is factored in, plus increased time spent going through security procedures, airline travel won't be any faster -- and may be slower -- than the high-speed trains.

One economic benefit is likely to be cuts in air fares. Another is the thousands of construction jobs and ongoing maintenance and service jobs that high-speed rail infrastructure will entail.

Remember, too, that driving often is full of aggravations that simply don't apply to train travel. It is dangerous, for instance, to try to do business on the phone while driving a car. On a train, it's both safe and easy. And anyone who has leaned back and relaxed during a train ride through thick Valley fog knows how much more safe and less stressful that journey is than by car.

Costa's measure, if backed by voters, would first provide high-speed rail service between the Bay Area and Los Angeles. Later, if voters are willing to back as much as \$25 billion in additional funding, new trains would blaze through the Valley on their way between Sacramento and San Diego. A link between the Northern San Joaquin Valley and Bay Area through Altamont Pass is a definite prospect.

There wouldn't be stops in every city, of course. That would defeat the purpose of high-speed rail. But Costa's measure includes nearly \$200 million for upgrades on existing Amtrak and commuter rail routes.

We hope Gov. Gray Davis makes sure that Costa's measure appears on the 2004 ballot by signing it now. It's in the best interests of everyone in the Valley.

Pricey cans not gas for Californians

By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer, Sept. 1, 2002

Hopefully, you didn't run out of gas this holiday weekend.

If you had, you might have discovered that prices for portable gas cans have skyrocketed -- if you were able to find any to begin with.

Two situations have converged to make gas cans in California permanently expensive and temporarily scarce.

The "expensive" part of the equation -- a jump to \$18 or so, from \$3 or \$4 -- comes from new regulations from the state Air Resources Board.

It turns out the approximately 12 million gas cans tucked away in garages around the state are a major source of pollution, coughing up 87 tons of smog-forming emissions every day.

That's equal to emissions from about 1 million cars, according to the air board.

So in 1999, the board decided new cans sold in California needed to be radically redesigned to cut down on harmful vapors rising from spills, flimsy spouts and the plastic walls of the containers themselves.

The regulations went into effect in January 2001, said Richard Varenchik, spokesman for the air board, but consumers probably didn't notice until the beginning of this year.

That's because vendors had a year to sell off any remaining old-style cans.

But at this point, there's a short-term wrinkle as the Golden State enters the costlier era of non-polluting cans.

In July, the air board banned cans from the state's largest supplier, Blitz USA Inc., which makes about 80 percent of the estimated 2 million new gas cans Californians buy every year, Varenchik said.

Blitz's new nozzles were spilling too much, so the cans were removed from shelves while the air board works with the manufacturer to fix the problem.

"We expect within the next month to start having their cans out on the market again," Varenchik said.

Overall, he added, things are going well for such a big switch.

"When you have a radical change in design, there is an expected period of making adjustments," Varenchik said.

By the end of the year, the air board expects the shake-out period, along with any temporary shortages, will be over.

And the air-quality payoff will be worth it in the long run, Varenchik said, when widespread use of the new cans will eliminate 70 tons of smog-forming emissions every day.

When the board adopted the regulations, it estimated improvements would drive up prices about \$6 to \$11 per can.

Some big chains, such as The Home Depot, said new cans on their way to California stores will run \$10 to \$16.

For local auto parts dealers, who tend to buy in smaller quantities, higher prices have shocked both store owners and their customers.

"Prices have gone through the roof," said Mike Marsh, manager of Oildale Auto Parts, where gas cans are now \$18 to \$25.

Baron's Auto Parts in Bakersfield no longer carries the cans since they were pulled from shelves after the recall.

At Pioneer Mercantile Co. in Bakersfield, it's the same story -- \$18 to \$25 for cans that used to be \$3 or \$4.

"People complain, sure," Calvin Brown, a clerk at the shop. "Once you explain that it's California ... it leaves a bad taste in customers' mouths, but what can they do? They have no choice."

[Bakersfield Californian, Community Voices, August 30, 2002](#)

Greenbelt could rein in sprawl

Jenny Gia-Briggs

What can we do about this bad air we have to breathe? Just to review a notoriously sorry fact, local air quality is the nation's second worst. Worse than New York, the Motor City, Chicago, Miami or any smelly metropolis you might picture -- except Los Angeles, of course, city of cars and rejecter of billion-dollar public transportation systems.

The respiratory disease rate continues to rise, including ozone-aggravated asthma. A teacher, I can testify to this truth, meeting increasingly more asthma-suffering kids each year. Now I have it, too!

All agree pollution is one of our area's most deadly problems. Looking at possible aggravators, we have seen dairies continue to be developed, along with mega-strip malls and endless new home complexes in the southwest and northwest.

These newest regions thrive, while the east and south sides, Bakersfield's historical core, atrophy. *The Los Angeles Times* wrote that Bakersfield has the "smallest population in the

greatest area of any city west of the Mississippi." Locals can drive 50 miles daily, to work in town, to pick up kids, to run errands, then home to the remote suburbs.

Our city keeps spreading, toward the Grapevine and Coastal Range, like the Blob. If this sprawl continues, we'll be like Orange County -- but with no ocean to blow the pollution away!

As well as dairies and new home developers, farmers and corporations overwhelm understaffed environmental agencies or inexplicably are given the green light to build by local politicians. Smog wafts in from the north and from the steady traffic on I-5. We suffer stagnant climate; basin geography; local emissions; overbred, methane-spewing cattle; gardeners' blowers; local apathy and irresponsibility -- the list goes on.

My question: has our city considered establishing a greenbelt? And if so, why isn't it being promoted more locally?

This greenbelt would enclose Bakersfield's boundaries, allowing development within them, but not past them. It would reign in development, creating an area of protected land, and allow citizens and decision makers to focus on this city as a defined entity. Because the city's limits would be described absolutely and therefore could be scrutinized more thoughtfully, intelligent changes could be made in development, conservation and lifestyle practices.

A few ideas: Have developers take their business to Bakersfield's core and rebuild there (certainly the families and children in our older neighborhoods deserve fresh new homes and grocery stores, too!). Substantially enlarge public transportation, then aggressively and continually advertise it. Add carpool lanes and change traffic light patterns so fewer cars idle at intersections. Hire and empower more air cops. Make I-5 through Kern County a toll road -- why not?

The greenbelt has worked in cities like Scottsdale, Ariz., Boulder, Colo., and Cambridge, Mass. Should it just be the option of privileged communities? At this stage, we are in a state of health emergency and something must be done. A loaded question to local decision makers: What should our priority be -- sprawling development and easy money or the health and lives of local citizens? It is that serious.

Jenny Gia-Briggs is a teacher in the Bakersfield City School District and is involved in community arts.

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, August 31, 2002](#)

Politics clouds air for Smog Check II

It has been said that when you shake hands with some politicians, you'd better count your fingers when you retrieve your hand. Not bad advice, and we were reminded of it this week as we read the news regarding the Smog Check II bill that has been approved by the Legislature.

To recap: Several California air districts, including ours -- the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District -- have complained for a long time because motorists in the Bay Area have been exempt from the state's vehicle emissions testing program. The air districts are concerned because they catch the Bay Area emissions.

Assemblyman Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, has repeatedly tried for a law that would require emission testing in the Bay Area, but politics being politics, his efforts have failed.

This year, however, Cardoza, who would dearly like to replace Gary Condit in Washington, has had better luck, and his bill, co-sponsored by his political opponent, state Sen. Dick Monteith, R-Modesto, made it through the Legislature. In the Assembly, the vote was 70-5, with three Democrats voting no, and in the Senate, the vote was 28-3, with no Democrats voting against it. The bill's fate now is in the hands of Gov. Gray Davis.

We congratulate Cardoza and Monteith on passage of the bill ... and now we're going to count our fingers.

Why do you suppose a proposal that has gone down in flames in previous years sailed through the legislature so easily this year?

Well, it could be that legislators want to do the right thing, or it could be that Senate President Pro Tem John Burton, D-San Francisco, and head of the Senate Democratic caucus, played a little politics by inserting an amendment into the bill.

The amendment we're referring to involves a lawsuit filed by the Sacramento and Yolo-Solano air districts. The suit, against the federal Environmental Protection Agency, is intended to impose broad restrictions on smog coming from the Bay area.

Now, the lawsuit, which includes the Smog Check II issue, could spell real trouble for some of Burton's constituents, and his amendment to AB 2637 says that the lawsuit must be dropped by Oct. 4 if the bill is to take effect, assuming it is signed by Davis.

What's likely to happen? If a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, we'd guess the two air districts will withdraw their suit, even though it will mean residents in the districts will have to continue breathing Bay Area pollution, but less of it, maybe.

The obvious question that arises from all of this, now, is: What roles, if any, did Cardoza and Monteith play in all of this?

Hard to say, because they can't be reached and their press people say they are only vaguely informed. We know, however, that Cardoza was in the loop to some extent.

It's not hard to imagine that Burton at some point picked up the phone and out of courtesy called Cardoza. And if he did, the conversation might have gone something like this:

"Dennis, this is John Burton."

"Hello, John. Say, I really want to thank you for your help on the Smog Check II bill. I can't tell you how much this means to me. It's the capstone to my time in the Assembly. It was one of my priorities when I took office, you know."

"Well, Dennis, you're quite welcome. And I hope this helps you get elected to Congress."

"I'm sure it will."

"Dennis, the reason I'm calling is to let you know I'm going to attach an amendment to the bill tomorrow."

Silence.

"Dennis, are you there."

"Yes, John. Uh, what sort of amendment are you talking about?"

"Well, Dennis, as you know, a couple of the air districts are trying to stir up trouble for some of my constituents in the Bay Area, and they've got this suit against the EPA. It could pose some problems, and we'd like the air districts to back off. So I'm going to stick an amendment onto your bill that will require the withdrawal of the suit before Smog Check II can take effect."

"John, do you think they'll withdraw the suit?"

"I have no reason to believe it will be a problem. Quid pro quo. They drop the suit, everybody gets Smog Check II and my other Bay Area polluters are happy. Everybody is happy."

"What about the people who have to breathe the other pollutants from the Bay Area."

"Dennis, that's the smell of money, and they've got to realize that. You can't make an omelette without cracking a few eggs, eh?"

"Well I guess so, John."

"Good boy, Dennis. All politics is local, right?"

"Right."

"Stop by my office tomorrow morning if you want to talk about this some more. I can hold the amendment, but I'm not sure what'll happen to your bill. Right now, with the amendment, I can guarantee no Democrat in the Senate will vote against it."

"I understand."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Now for a footnote: If the EPA would do its job in the first place, state politics would not play a roll in air pollution control. But the EPA has not been doing its job, and so we have the politics ... and the dirty air.