

S.J. Valley lawmakers cry foul Point to study on federal funding gap

By Abbie Dutcher

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CLOVIS -- Lawmakers from the San Joaquin Valley say the eight-county region hasn't been getting its fair share of federal funding to deal with traffic, air pollution, water quality and other issues.

In a joint news conference via satellite from Washington, Democratic and Republican lawmakers pointed to a preliminary congressional study that shows the Valley doesn't receive the same level of funding as other regions around the country.

"The San Joaquin Valley has been shortchanged by the federal government," Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, said at a news conference beamed to reporters and officials at the Center for Advanced Research and Technology in Clovis. "We have real problems that demand real solutions."

Joining Cardoza were Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, and Rep. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, whose congressional district includes a portion of the Central Valley.

Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, and Rep. Bill Thomas, R-Bakersfield, are also part of the group but were unable to attend the news conference.

In June, six lawmakers asked the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service to study the socioeconomic and environmental concerns of the Central Valley and assess the level of federal investment and assistance coming to cities and counties in the region.

Among the preliminary report's findings:

- In 2000, the San Joaquin Valley as a whole had a poverty rate of 20.5 percent, higher than the national rate of 12.4 percent and California with 14.2 percent. In San Joaquin County, 17.7 percent of the population was below the poverty level.
- The Valley experienced significantly higher population growth rates from 1990 to 2003 than did California or the country as a whole. By 2003, the region's population had grown by 30.6 percent to more than 3.5 million, with San Joaquin County jumping a hefty 31.7 percent. By comparison, the state's population had grown by 25.7 percent, while the nation's growth rate was 9.8 percent.

Lawmakers have requested a meeting with officials at the White House to discuss the report.

In addition, they plan to use the report to advance a bill to include Highway 99 in the federal interstate system, which would make the highway eligible for increased funding.

"Certainly, transportation and infrastructure are going to be major components," predicted Sean Snaith, an associate professor of business economics at University of the Pacific and director of UOP's Business Forecasting Center.

Mike Locke, head of the San Joaquin Business Partnership, said California tends to chip in more tax dollars than it gets back in funding for programs. Education, roads and highways, law enforcement and other needs in the state have been underfunded or not funded at all, he said.

"If Valley lawmakers can speak with one voice, it will have an impact," Locke said. "People may look at it as pork. But the reality is, we ought to be able to return a (higher) percentage of money locally, and that just hasn't been happening."

The Valley has experienced a surge in population in recent years, and the population's dynamics have changed, Cardoza said. The eight counties haven't been getting reimbursed enough for federal programs, which may explain the funding shortfall, he said.

Ag News

News brief in the Valley Voice
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Supporters of building an ethanol industry in California have reacted negatively to new charges by California Air Resources Board (CARB) fuel manager Steve Brisby's assertion that the state should continue to seek a waiver from the federal government so we wouldn't have blend gasoline with ethanol.

An article in a recent LA Weekly edition quoted Brisby as lamenting the fact that hydrocarbon emission had gone up last summer implying the increase was due to ethanol. Neil Koehler, who heads the California Renewable Fuels Partnership, wrote back that "Total emissions today with ethanol blended gasoline measured by the State are approximately 400 tons per day LESS than they were when MTBE was banned in 2002." Plus, California had the best air quality last summer - the first year that ethanol was used statewide.

Koehler is also president of Pacific Ethanol looking to build two plants in the central valley. Koehler has been in a running battle with CARB over ethanol - each seeking support for their position from the governor. A 1998 study says ethanol tends to permeate from hoses from cars carrying with it nasty ingredients in gasoline. But Koehler says newer cars have no such problem. He notes corn-based ethanol is at least 30 cents cheaper than gas.

Newest lawn care inventions: remote mowers, no-mow grass

By Jay Romano
New York Times, Feb. 9, 2005

For nearly 30 years, Farm Show Magazine, based in Lakeville, Minn., has been entertaining and educating its readers by presenting a seemingly endless stream of gadgets, gizmos and inventions designed to make country life easier.

Items from its recent "Best of Farm Show" issue include a remote- controlled lawn mower, a foot-pedal starter for mowers, slow-growing grass, vertical planters and an odor-killing light bulb. "These are among our most popular products," said Bill Gergen, an editor at the magazine (www.farmshow.com). "We haven't had complaints about any of them."

The remote-controlled lawn mower has a 6.5-horsepower gas engine and a 22- inch blade and can be operated from up to 2,000 feet away using a radio- controlled transmitter. "You can sit on the porch and mow your lawn," said Luis Medina, the model's inventor. "Top speed is 8 miles per hour, and it will cut up to 4 acres per gallon." He added that the machine is ideal for elderly and disabled people. An electric-start version sells for \$2,299; a manual- start model sells for \$1,600 from Evatech Inc., Tarpon Springs, Fla.; (727) 938-8890; www.evatech.net <<http://www.evatech.net>>.

For those who have a lawn mower but also have difficulty pulling the rope to start the motor, Dave Lyon, president of the Step Start Corp., has invented a foot-pedal starter for rope-start mowers. "My wife likes to mow the lawn, but she has trouble pulling the cord," Lyon said, describing the inspiration behind his invention. The EZ Foot Pedal Starter fits most walk-behind mowers and is installed using four adjustable clamps. Once it is mounted, the operator uses body weight and leg strength to start the mower. The device sells for \$69.95 at Step Start Corp., Monroeville, Ala., (866) 328-7587; www.stepstart.com.

[For homeowners who don't want to mow -- or want to mow as infrequently as possible -- Sherry Jansen has just the thing: NoMowGrass.](#)

"We guarantee that our grass will be the softest grass you'll ever lay your feet on," Jansen said. "And you'll only have to mow it two or three times a year to keep it looking manicured." The grass -- a mix of creeping bluegrass and centipede grass -- grows to about 3.5 inches high under ordinary conditions. And because the seeds are smaller than normal grass seed, a pound of NoMowGrass will cover a larger area -- about 1,200 square feet --

than a pound of ordinary grass seed. A 5-pound bag costs about \$55 from NoMowGrass, Cleveland, Minn., (866) 666-6947; www.nomowgrass.com <<http://www.nomowgrass.com>>.

Want to light up a room and clean the air at the same time? An O-ZONELite may be just what you're looking for. David deMartino, chief executive of the O- ZONELite company, said that his company's screw-in, fluorescent light bulbs are coated with titanium dioxide, a natural mineral found in rocks and sand. When the light is turned on, he said, a chemical reaction kills airborne pathogens. The bulbs are energy savers -- they provide about 100 watts of light using 23 watts of energy and last about 10,000 hours -- and cost \$39. 95 each at O-ZONELite, Deerfield Beach, Fla., (800) 494-8292; [www.ozonelite. com](http://www.ozonelite.com).

For those with a green thumb but limited space in which to practice their art, Lee Blevins has developed a "crop tower" system that makes it possible to grow as many as 36 plants in about 2 square feet of space. "Our Agro-Towers are perfect for people who want to grow plants or vegetables but who only have small patios or terraces," Blevins said. "You can even grow on asphalt." The planters are stackable -- each section has six planting ports 4 inches in diameter and 8 inches deep -- and are made from food-quality polyurethane. A six-section stack -- \$59.95 - - stands 4 feet high, from Lee Blevins, Atascadero, (888) 269-5343; www.growpots.com <<http://www.growpots.com>>.