

Task force draws attention, dollars to SJ Valley

State panel working to improve economy, life in 8-county area

By E.J. SCHULTZ - BEE CAPITOL BUREAU

Modesto Bee Thurs., April 13, 2006

SACRAMENTO - Here's a twist. Silicon Valley is jealous of the San Joaquin Valley.

Believe it, says Victoria Bradshaw, state secretary of labor and work force development: "The other valley is beginning to think we're spending too much time in the San Joaquin Valley."

Bradshaw is one of eight Cabinet secretaries assigned to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, a task force appointed by Gov. Schwarzenegger that is charged with improving the economy and living conditions of the eight-county region.

When the governor announced the 26-member task force in June, he promised "action, action, action." Bradshaw and others say they are delivering.

"There is more cooperation and more collaboration than we've ever seen before," said Sunne Wright McPeak, a Livingston native who is state secretary of business, transportation and housing and the partnership's leader.

The group gets feedback from business and civic leaders from throughout the valley. Eight work groups focus on everything from air quality to education. Public forums were held last week in Fresno and Hanford.

The partnership expires Nov. 1. At that time, members will submit an action plan on how to improve the region, which extends from San Joaquin County south to Kern County. Partnership members cite the following accomplishments so far:

Clean-air incentives - Legislation has been introduced that would create a valleywide Air Quality Mitigation Zone that would give tax incentives for investments in air-quality mitigation technologies and production of clean energy. Another bill would help low-income residents replace high-polluting vehicles.

Nursing training - A consortium of valley health-care training companies is being formed, with state assistance, to improve nursing training. Examples of projects include creating a database of eligible faculty.

Highway 99 - A spending proposal was adopted for the aging highway, calling for an immediate \$1 billion investment. Partnership members say the plan helped get the highway on the lists of proposals for a statewide infrastructure bond.

Education - Legislation has been introduced to give poorperforming school districts more flexibility when spending money and setting curricula.

Transportation - Partnership input helped valley agencies land \$2 million from a \$5 million pot of state money for regional transportation planning.

Some of these accomplishments are works in progress. For instance, the Highway 99 plan will mean little unless lawmakers reach a deal to get an infrastructure bond on the ballot.

Talks broke down to get the measure on the June ballot, and the focus has shifted to November.

Though some Highway 99 momentum might be lost, McPeak said, "I think the vigilance that the San Joaquin Valley leaders and legislators continue to is going to be very helpful ... to keep that funding in place."

Meanwhile, legislation recommended by the committee and embraced by valley lawmakers still must pass the Legislature.

Assembly Member Juan Arambula, D-Fresno, wrote the air quality and education bills with input from the partnership. But while the partnership endorsement might mean something if the bills reach the governor's desk, they will have to pass the Legislature on their own merits, he said.

That the partnership was cre-ated at all could be considered a major accomplishment.

Valley groups, including the Regional Jobs Initiative, lobbied the Schwarzenegger administration for months. They argued that the valley's chronic unemployment, high crime rate, poor air quality and run-down infrastructure were bringing down the entire state.

Leaders originally expressed frustration that they couldn't get the governor's attention. But now that the administration is on board, officials are mostly pleased.

"They really are committed, they really are present," said Ashley Swearengen, chief operating officer of the RJI, a grassroots job-creation effort.

But there are limits on how much can be accomplished, as evidenced by one recent failure.

Earlier this year, the partnership applied for a \$15 million federal work force development grant. Leaders planned to use it to train workers for employment in food processing, logistics and health care. But the valley was left out; 13 other regions got the money.

View on emission measures revisited

Governor says he backs capping greenhouse gas output by 2012.

By Andy Furillo -- Bee Capitol Bureau
Sacramento Bee Thurs., April 13, 2006

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Wednesday sought to dispel the notion that he has backtracked from tough measures to combat global warming, saying he "can live" with capping greenhouse gas emissions by 2012.

In response to a reporter's question at UC Davis on Wednesday, Schwarzenegger characterized the 2012 caps as "a great idea" toward achieving the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 - a 25 percent cut in pollution projections from current forecasts.

On Tuesday, the governor said at his Climate Action Summit in San Francisco that the state's market-oriented approach toward corralling greenhouse gas pollution should begin "without the caps." The concern, he said, is that they might hurt business.

Some environmentalists expressed disappointment with the governor's position, and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., put out a statement Wednesday saying "my heart fell when I saw that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger had backed away from a strong position on global warming."

Feinstein said she favored the "cap-and-trade" approach - opposed by some businesses - in which companies that exceeded greenhouse gas reduction standards could trade their surpluses to other firms that were lagging behind. She called Schwarzenegger's statements in San Francisco "very problematic."

The governor, however, on Wednesday tried to move himself back into the forefront of the global

warming fight at the conclusion of a tour at UC Davis, where he announced a \$1 million grant to help the college build the nation's first energy efficiency center.

In again expressing support for meeting the 2020 reduction target, he voiced support for portions of a bill introduced by Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, and Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, that would meet the goal by first requiring mandatory reporting of emission levels, then capping them beginning in 2012.

"I have an approach to say let's carefully bring in those caps so we don't chase businesses away," Schwarzenegger said, according to a transcript of his remarks to reporters. "I think that Assemblywoman Pavley, for instance, has recommended in her bill ... 2012. I think that I can live with 2012. I think that's a great idea."

As it is now written, Assembly Bill 32 by Pavley and Núñez does not spell out a year when the caps would be put into place. But Pavley said Wednesday that draft language is now under discussion that is "along the lines of what the governor is talking about," with an eye for imposing the caps in 2012.

"It's fluid," Pavley said of the bill and the governor's movement toward it. "But it seems we're a lot closer today than we were yesterday."

[Editorial in the Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee Thurs., April 13, 2006](#)

Editorial: Don't waver on a waiver

Governor's appeal to Bush is on target

The Bush administration's attempt to block California from enforcing tougher emissions standards on new cars and trucks is not being ignored by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

To his credit, Schwarzenegger sent Bush a letter this week urging him to let California enforce new rules requiring auto companies to reduce greenhouse gases from their vehicles by 30 percent by 2016. The federal EPA needs to issue a waiver for California to enforce the rules. Yet the automobile industry is lobbying against the waiver, claiming (falsely) that the rules represent fuel efficiency standards, which only the federal government has authority to set.

In his letter, Schwarzenegger talked about California's pioneering efforts to control air pollution, and the serious consequences of climate change. "Global warming is a grave threat to California's water supply, our coastline, our environment, our economy and the public health of our citizens," Schwarzenegger wrote. "Global warming is likely worsening the severe weather that has caused so much damage of late in the States."

On this issue, Bush's supposed support for state self-determination conflicts with his attempts to deny that global warming is a reality. There should be no contest here. The EPA has granted waiver requests to California more than 30 times in the last four decades. It should do so again, without further delay.

[Editorial, Visalia Times-Delta Thurs., April 13, 2006:](#)

Green cars are good step for county

Government must take a lead role in caring for the environment, both in conserving resources and in cleaning our air and water.

Over the years, we have been especially insistent that public agencies become practical role models in reducing air pollution and conserving energy. If it is going to lecture the rest of us, the public sector needs to walk the walk by employing strategies such as car-pooling, setting thermostats lower and refraining from damaging practices like open burning.

So it is good to see Tulare County adopting a practical strategy for conserving energy and reducing emissions that contribute to air pollution by converting its vehicle fleet to hybrid cars.

The county this week adopted a policy for replacing fleet vehicles with hybrids, which combine standard internal combustion power with electricity from rechargeable batteries. Hybrids get more than double the gas mileage of conventional vehicles and have fewer emissions. They are more expensive than a comparable standard model, but owners recoup the extra cost in gas savings.

As county cars go out of service because of age or breakdowns, they will be replaced by hybrids. The county has more than 850 vehicles spread over every department, and 56 of them are hybrids, used by the Health and Human Services Agency, Resource Management Agency and the Agricultural Commissioner's Office.

Exempted from the hybrid changeover will be law enforcement agencies, including the Sheriff's Department, District Attorney's Office, Public Defender and Probation.

It is understandable why the county would exempt sheriff's cars, on which extraordinary demands are placed. Probation Department workers also transport offenders and parolees, so it's understandable why that department would also be exempt.

We don't see the reasoning for exempting either the District Attorney or Public Defender's offices, neither of which are involved in actual enforcement. If either agency needed to keep a couple of standard vehicles on hand for investigators, that would be understandable. But otherwise, those employees are not participating in pursuit or patrol, so why shouldn't they also drive hybrids? We have a hunch the reasoning has something to do with the pecking order of law enforcement, and if that's so, all concerned ought to drop their turf games and concentrate on what is best for our county and our environment.

Setting a good example in its attention to the environment is an important role for the county. Having everyone participate will make it seem less like a token gesture and more like some actual progress is being made. Every car they can convert to a hybrid saves us all money.

After all, the ultimate objective here is to let people know: If these cars are good enough for our county's leaders to drive, they ought to be good enough for everybody.

[Commentary in the San Diego Union-Tribune Wed., April 12, 2006:](#)

EPA administrator responds on Mexican trucks

Several local residents have written letters recently taking issue with the federal and local governments' assistance in retrofitting Mexican diesel trucks traveling in the United States with pollution control devices.

The assistance comes in response to a Bush administration policy announced in 2002 and confirmed by the Supreme Court in 2004 that for the first time will allow commercial trucks from Mexico to cross the border and travel throughout the United States. Mexican trucks are currently allowed to cross and operate within the border commercial zone, roughly 25 miles within the United States.

The North American Free Trade Agreement paved the way for Mexican trucks to enter the United States more broadly. With the prospect of more trucks from Mexico regularly traveling across our borders, environmental regulators began looking for ways to reduce air pollution from these vehicles.

Fortunately, diesel emissions are an easy emission reduction target: for relatively little money and resources, we are able to make great strides in protecting public health. Diesel exhaust exacerbates respiratory conditions. Children and the elderly are generally at greatest risk and suffer from the effects of asthma, bronchitis, lung cancer and other chronic health conditions.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its partners throughout the country are pursuing the diesel issue in two ways: through tighter fuel standards and stricter engine standards.

Efforts such as the National Clean Diesel Campaign and the West Coast Collaborative are accelerating the pace of environmental protection by turning over fleets sooner. These actions take advantage of cleaner burning fuels and new technologies, including engine replacement and retrofit technology. That is why we have been working in partnership with the San Diego Air Pollution Control District to retrofit older diesel engines with technology that will reduce diesel pollution from older vehicles crossing the border.

Mexico, in turn, has made some very promising commitments in the last couple of years in stepping up efforts to reduce its own sources of diesel pollution. Mexico did the right thing last year when the government committed to making ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel commercially available in its border states. Mexico has also proposed more stringent diesel engine standards for its new trucks that will reduce emissions.

We share the air along the U.S.-Mexico border. Reducing diesel pollution and improving air quality needs to be a shared effort as well. Dirty air does not respect borders, and respiratory

health affects are a shared challenge. Improving our shared air corridors improves the quality of life for Americans and Mexicans alike.

WAYNE NASTRI

Regional Administrator, U.S. EPA Pacific Southwest, San Diego

[Letter to the Editor, Visalia Times-Delta Thurs., April 13, 2006:](#)

Too many leaf blowers, not enough bike racks

I keep reading about more bike routes and trails in Visalia, but it seems to be all talk. I do everything in Visalia on my bicycle, but so many shopping areas don't have bike racks, not even the new post office on Akers. I've asked and asked with no results.

All I have are tall poles or trees, and lately they're taken up with other bikes, these stores know who they are. While I'm on my bike, I've encountered leaf blower after leaf blower. Talk about dust, noise and pollution. Nobody picks up anything - not even weeds are picked. Weed killer spray is sprayed just before they start leaf blowers. No wonder we have so much asthma and breathing problems; but they rather blame that on the farmers.

Lately I have seen them trying to blow wet leaves, sidewalks and gutters; then the next blower arrives and blows the clippings and dirt right back to the original spot, or a fast car comes by first. The noise, dust and pollution never settles in the town, thanks to leaf blowers.

I'm tired of dust being blown in my face while I bike. Why can't these polluters be outlawed? Why can't they vacuum sidewalks, gutters and parking lots to cut down on some pollution?

R.W. VAN DYK, Visalia