Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, March 10, 2007:

Deadly clunkers

Air district has a plan to get gross polluters off Valley roads.

The Valley's air district has announced an ambitious effort to rid the roads of some of the biggest pollution offenders. It's good news, and the state and federal governments should find the funds that will be needed.

The new plan calls for pulling 30,000 so-called "gross polluters" off Valley roads. That's five times more than the previous goal. It won't be cheap: The idea is for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to offer the owners of such cars $5,000 for them, and then destroy the cars after the purchase.

That addresses one problem with such efforts: Most of the gross polluters are older vehicles operated by people who cannot afford newer cars or the maintenance of their older ones. Paying them for the old cars eases that difficulty.

Of course, that adds up to a lot of money, considering that the state estimates there are about 200,000 such vehicles in operation in California.

But the payoff in cleaner air would be significant. While gross polluters are fewer than 10% of the total of vehicles on California's roads, they produce more than half of the smog-causing emissions from light gasoline engines. A smoking car's emissions can be 75 times as toxic as those from a well-maintained car.

Removing 30,000 of the pollution-spewing cars would cut two tons of pollution from Valley skies each day.

The district plans to use data from the state's Smog Check program to identify the gross polluters. That's fine so far as it goes, but such an approach won't reach those who've given up on trying to get their older vehicles past the smog test. Many do so because there are few consequences.

It may be time to raise an idea that surfaced a few years ago. Technology exists to allow roadside monitors to "sniff" the exhaust of passing vehicles. That could be used in conjunction with Smog Check results to identify even more of the offending polluters. At least four states already employ such technology.

There has been resistance in California, though. Bureaucrats and regulators have objected, saying the system isn't proven, or isn't effective enough -- despite a study from the state's own Air Resources Board that concluded the devices could accurately pinpoint the 2% "worst of the worst."

Others object to the "Big Brother" nature of such devices. But that's a bogus argument. Driving is a privilege, not a right, and safeguards against abuse can be built into any system.

This effort will require the support of the public, and especially our representatives in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. The air district has made a good pitch. Now our leaders must step up to the funding plate.

Smog-belching clunkers

San Joaquin air regulators want to buy polluting cars.

From the Associated Press
in the Tracy Press, Friday, March 9, 2007

FRESNO - Regional air officials who want to get 30,000 smog-belching clunkers off the road said Thursday they want to offer owners up to $5,000 each to buy a newer, cleaner car.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said the effort would help clean the region's air, which ranks among the nation's dirtiest, but still won't meet a 2013 federal deadline.

Still, it's an ambitious proposal - contingent on passage by district's board and funding - that would retire older cars bought by the district, said Seyed Sadredin, the group's executive director.

The district would look for the dirtiest cars through state smog-testing records, and then offer owners up to $1,000 to destroy them, or $5,000 to buy a newer car. The voluntary plan could eliminate up to two tons of pollution each day, he said.

The regional air district is under federal pressure to reduce 75 percent of nitrogen oxides in the air, a smog-causing gas that comes mostly from cars. The panel has said it is impossible to reach the 2013 deadline set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is expected to request an 11-year extension.

Community activists said valley residents have breathed in corrosive air long enough.

“People are going to be breathing dirty air and suffering for years longer,” said Liza Bolanos, coordinator of the Fresno-based Central Valley Air Quality Coalition. “I don’t think they have made their case for this delay.”

A public hearing on the smog cleanup plan was scheduled for April 30 at the district headquarters in Fresno.

Car seller battling state over air rules
California wants regs stricter than feds’
By SUSAN HERENDEEN - BEE STAFF WRITER <mailto:metro@modbee.com?subject=Car seller battling state over air rules>
Modesto Bee, Sunday, March 11, 2007

A Modesto car dealership is ground zero for a challenge to California's effort to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles.

Central Valley Chrysler Automotive and nine other dealerships want to stop implementation of regulations adopted by the California Air Resources Board more than two years ago.

The rules would raise fuel efficiency standards for new cars sold in the state, pushing them up to 40.6 mpg for cars and light trucks and up to 25.9 mpg for heavy-duty trucks by 2016.

Ten states are waiting to adopt California's regulations, and six more are considering them, but none can push forward unless California gets a waiver from the federal government.

Auto manufacturers say states have no business setting standards stricter than those set by the federal government, and dealerships in the San Joaquin Valley have signed on to help make their point.

"They could have cars that come into California and cars that couldn't come into California," said attorney Timothy Jones of Fresno, who represents the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers.

Manufacturers can sell any combination of vehicles as long as the average fuel economy of their fleet meets the overall standard.

Under federal rules, they must meet fleetwide standards of 27.5mpg for passenger cars and 23.1 mpg for heavy-duty trucks.

To meet California rules, manufacturers might have to limit the availability of low-gas-mileage vehicles, build smaller cars or invest in technology that would raise sticker prices.

Valley car dealers would take the biggest hit, Jones said, because heavy-duty trucks used in agriculture-related industries make up a high proportion of their sales.

Sued state in 2001

So the Modesto dealership - which sued the air board in 2001, forcing the state to scrap a requirement that 10 percent of new autos be zero-emission vehicles - is the lead plaintiff.

"Somebody's got to be No.1 listed on the pleadings," Jones said.

John W. Gardner, president of Central Valley Chrysler Automotive, referred inquiries to Jones, saying he can't talk about the case.

But he shared his opinion in a declaration filed with the U.S. District Court in Fresno.

In it, Gardner said his family-owned business would suffer if manufacturers are forced to meet stricter fuel-efficiency standards because prices would rise and fewer models would be available.

"Brand loyalty to Chrysler and Jeep vehicles will have reduced value if Central Valley Automotive cannot offer updated models of the vehicles that our customers know," Gardner told the court. "Our revenues will suffer as a result."

Owners of other dealerships that are party to the lawsuit filed similar statements.

They include Leonard Harrington of Tom Fields Motors Inc. of Turlock, which sells Dodge, Chrysler, Jeep and Suburu; and Brian Wells of Courtesy Automotive Center in Merced, which sells Chevrolet and Cadillac.

In recent months, the dealers have had visits from activists who want them to drop out of the litigation.

David Jones, a culinary arts instructor from Modesto, said he has made several trips to Gardner's McHenry Avenue dealership to drop off stacks of petitions collected by the Union for Concerned Scientists, a national environmental group.

Jones, who is not related to attorney Timothy Jones, said he has been greeted by salesmen who think he is a liberal nut. He said he thinks consumers would buy smarter cars and trucks if the industry made them.

"They're suing to maintain a dinosaur fleet of huge, gas-guzzling vehicles that are destroying the environment," said David Jones, who drives a Toyota Prius, a gas-electric hybrid that emits fewer greenhouse gases than traditional automobiles.

Erin Rogers, California outreach coordinator for the Union of Concerned Scientists, said manufacturers fought seat belts and air bags too, then complied with new regulations without going bankrupt.

Her group recently unveiled plans for a minivan that could be built with existing technology and cut tailpipe pollutants by 40 percent, more than enough to meet California's proposed standards.

The minivan is not a gas-electric hybrid. It would cost $300 more than its peers, the scientists said, and consumers would save $1,300 in two years, by getting better gas mileage.

"Cars of all sizes and shapes in all classes can be made cleaner," Rogers said.

The state air board's rules come from Assembly Bill 1493, which was approved by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Davis in 2002.

Lawmakers told the air board to design rules aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles.

The air board adopted regulations in September 2004, and the car dealers challenged them in federal court three months later.

The litigation has drawn nationwide attention, with five environmental groups intervening to argue in favor of California's emission standards.

Supporters of stricter standards say lawmakers must deal with auto emissions because they contribute to global warming, which has caused rising sea levels, decreased snowpack and spring runoff as well as more severe weather and wildfires.

In legal papers, the state attorney general's office argues that California can regulate greenhouse gas emissions under a waiver provision in the 1975 federal Clean Air Act.

That law carved out a loophole for California because the state had regulated air pollution long before the federal government got involved.

The loophole also lets other states adopt stricter rules, as long as California does so first.

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington plan to implement California standards if California gets a waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Now it gets more complicated.

The auto industry argues that only the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration may set fuel standards.

And the federal EPA in 2003 said it cannot regulate greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles under the Clean Air Act.

So Massachusetts challenged the federal government. The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in November and a ruling is expected this summer.

All of this leads back to Modesto, because the lawsuit brought by Central Valley Chrysler Automotive and others is on hold until the high court makes a ruling in the Massachusetts case.

If the EPA wins, California would have little chance of getting a waiver and demanding more fuel-efficient cars, making the car dealers' lawsuit moot.

"If we lose, we need to turn to Congress," Rogers said.

If Massachusetts wins and California gets its waiver, the court battle in Fresno will continue.
"The dealers are very concerned," Timothy Jones said.

Democrats intend to press carmakers on fuel economy
By Sholnn Freeman
Washington Post, Sunday, March 11, 2007

WASHINGTON **-** House Democrats, emboldened to act on global warming, intend to push automakers at a hearing this week to accept higher fuel-economy standards.

The new leadership sees control of Congress as a chance to break through years of industry opposition to improved gasoline mileage. Auto executives are expected to argue that any major increases would cost the industry billions of dollars.

"They have resisted any increase in fuel-economy standards for the last 20 years," said Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass. "I want to determine whether or not they've changed their tune, whether or not they are now willing to improve fuel economy and reduce emissions into the atmosphere."

The auto executives scheduled to testify Wednesday before the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee on energy and air quality include Richard Wagoner of General Motors, Alan Mulally of Ford Motor, Tom LaSorda of DaimlerChrysler's Chrysler Group and James Press of Toyota Motor.

Markey said he planned to introduce legislation Tuesday that would mandate a fuel-efficiency increase to 35 miles per gallon by 2018, with a further increase of 4 percent a year afterward. The U.S. standard now is 24.9 miles per gallon.

Proposed Bush administration rules have sought to soften the impact of regulations on the financially strapped industry. The White House plan would lift fuel-economy standards by as much as 4 percent a year over 10 years, an increase that automakers have said would be too strict.

Automakers said the industry would have to spend billions of dollars to change vehicle plans and add high-cost technology to comply with the administration proposal.

"The numbers will never add up," said Greg Martin, a GM spokesman. "You can end up hobbling an industry with little in return."

Automakers also are worried that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Barbara Boxer are taking the lead in spurring Congress to action. Both are Democrats from California, which has some of the nation's toughest regulations over the auto industry.

Pelosi has pledged to make combating oil independence and global warming priorities for Democrats in Congress. Friday, she named Markey chairman of a select committee on those issues.

Some House members said the committee was created to pressure Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, and Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va., chairman of the energy and air quality subcommittee.

Boucher said his goal is to craft a bill on global warming that could win the support of House Republicans and industries that produce the greenhouse gases thought to cause atmospheric change.

The fuel-economy debate has been deadlocked for years in Washington, with the auto industry arguing about costs and complaining that new rules would force them to build smaller vehicles that consumers don't want.

"They said the same thing in 1975 when Congress doubled the fuel-economy standards," Markey said. Setting aside arguments on how tougher rules could harm the industry's bottom line, Markey said, "I think the greater threat is that they don't have more fuel-efficient automobiles and light trucks" to compete.

See you in court
An anti-nuclear group says a court fight looms if air regulators fail to follow the letter of a state environmental law over explosive tests at Site 300.
By Niko Kyriakou
Tracy Press, Saturday, March 10, 2007

An environmental group sees a potential court fight ahead if air regulators fail to evaluate explosives testing at Site 300 using a landmark state environmental law.

Tri-Valley CAREs, an anti-nuclear watchdog group that monitors Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, says experimental explosions at Site 300 near Tracy are regulated by the California Environmental Quality Act.

Tri-Valley wants the San Joaquin County Air Pollution Control District to follow the environmental law's stringent guidelines as they investigate the health impacts of the lab's test explosions, which sometimes involve radioactive materials.

"It looks very likely that they (the air district) will do a CEQA analysis, but if they chose not to, they could end up in court," said Tri-Valley CAREs staff attorney Loulena Miles.

The district says it has not yet determined whether the law applies to the Site 300 tests.

All eyes turned toward the lab Tuesday when the air district revoked the lab's permit to do outdoor explosions bigger than 100 pounds of TNT.

The lab's permit was revoked after local activist Robert Sarvey filed an appeal complaining that the air district did not take into account the dangers of radioactive materials in the blasts before it granted the permit.

The lab says its tests abide by all state and federal laws but it will have to reapply to the district for new permits before it can resume larger detonations.

The act's guidelines would require the air district to extensively examine the risks of the combined effects of various emissions.

"One of the ways institutions like Livermore Lab get away with conducting hazardous activities is they look at hazardous activities in isolation," said Marylia Kelley, director of Tri-Valley CAREs. In addition, Tri-Valley says the state law would also force the lab to release more information and would spark public hearings about the issue.

"CEQA is really a key statute that will trigger disclosure of information to the public and that mandates them (the air district) to hold hearings and forces them to minimize problems to the environment," said Miles.

According to Matt Zinn, an environmental attorney for Shute, Mihaly and Weinberger in San Francisco, while the state law offers some exemptions, it probably does apply to the air district's review of Site 300.

"If there's a fair argument that the project would have significant environmental effect, then they (the air pollution district) have to investigate using CEQA," said Zinn.
Determining what constitutes a significant effect is "a fairly discretionary decision for the agency," he added.

Kings Co. toxic site comment sought
Feds host meetings this month on PCB plan for Kettleman Hills facility.
By Erik Lacayo / The Fresno Bee
Monday, March 12, 2007

Federal environmental officials will host meetings this month to get public input on whether the Kettleman Hills facility should be allowed to continue to store polychlorinated biphenyl, also known as PCB waste.

The Kings County meetings are part of a permit application process the plant must undergo.

PCB chemicals, which can cause cancer, were used in electrical equipment until Congress banned their use in 1976.

Kettleman Hills, the West's largest hazardous waste landfill, is the only California facility permitted to accept PCBs.

A permit drafted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would require Chemical Waste Management Inc., the operator of Kettleman Hills, to monitor the air more closely for PCBs.

"This represents a level of analysis never before seen for PCB in the country," said Paula Bisson, a manager in the EPA's San Francisco office.

Bob Henry, operations manager at the Kettleman Hills facility, said Chemical Waste Management already takes air samples every 12 days to monitor for several chemicals, including PCB.

The drafted permit would also require the facility to monitor air outside its property, Henry said.

Along with the drafted permit that would expire in 2013, the EPA also released an Environmental Justice Assessment that looks at the impact the facility has on the local community.

Kettleman City, a town of about 1,500 people, is about 4 miles away, near Interstate 5.

According to that assessment, the EPA found no evidence that Kettleman City or Avenal are adversely impacted by the landfill.

"I'm just ecstatic about the EPA's findings," Henry said.

Henry called the EPA investigation "thorough" and expects the permit to continue to store PCBs will be approved. "Everything is looking good," he said.

Yet, one local activist disputes the EPA's assessment.

Maricela Mares-Alatorre, a member of People for Clean Air and Water in Kettleman City, said the EPA needs to conduct an in-depth health survey in the area. "I think it's really shoddy work," she said. "They weren't very thorough."

Mares-Alatorre said many residents in Kettleman City are fighting cancer or facing fertility problems. "We need to figure out why that is," she said.

Mares-Alatorre said she hopes the EPA will deny the Kettleman Hills permit.

Erica Swinney, a community organizer with San Francisco-based Greenaction, said there are ways of dealing with PCB other than storing it at a landfill.

Those methods are more expensive, but it's better than having the chemicals near a community, she said.

"It's no longer acceptable to have any kind of toxic waste in people's backyards," Swinney said.

The group plans to go door-to-door today in Kettleman City to inform the public of the meetings, she said. Greenaction and other environmental groups are also planning a March 27 demonstration in Kettleman City.

Henry said the Kettleman Hills facility has a good environmental record and invites anyone from the community to tour the facility.

The PCB permit renewal meetings won't be the last time this year that environmental groups are expected to protest at the Kettleman Hills facility.

Henry said a more controversial battle looms because the facility is reaching capacity and needs to expand.

Henry said he expects Kings County to release a draft Environmental Impact Report on the expansion in May or June.

Chemical Waste Management wants to expand one of its landfills from 53 acres to 64 acres and build a new landfill.

Swinney said she plans on being in Kettleman City a lot this year, "We'll be busy."

Bill to ban dairies near Allensworth park creates uproar
By Sarah Jimenez / The Fresno Bee
Sunday, March 11, 2007

State legislators have stepped into the Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park fray, introducing a bill to ban dairies near the site and igniting a firestorm with county officials about who should be making local land-use decisions.

The measure is the latest development in a lengthy battle over a Visalia man's plan to build two dairies near the park that sits in southwestern Tulare County.

Assembly Bill 576 -- introduced by the Legislative Black Caucus -- would make it illegal to operate animal feeding operations within five miles of the park.

If approved, the bill would take effect immediately, but it requires a two-thirds vote.

The bill's main authors are six Southern California Assembly members and one Oakland Assembly member. The Valley's Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, and Assembly Member Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, are co-authors. The park falls in their districts.

Plans are in the works to solve the issue without legislation. Dairy applicant Sam Etchegaray and the Trust for Public Land, a private nonprofit, continue negotiations for the trust to possibly buy a portion of the dairyman's property or buy dairy development rights for the land.

Under the latter option, Etchegaray would retain ownership of the land but would not be permitted to use the area for livestock operations, creating a buffer zone between the park and his remaining land.

Etchegaray is proposing to house about 12,250 cows, including 7,500 Holstein milk cows, at his dairies. The closest dairy would be a little more than a mile from the community and park.

For months, park supporters -- most from the Bay and Los Angeles areas -- have fought with Tulare County officials to keep the 160-acre dairies away, saying flies and odor would ruin the ambience of the site dedicated to black history and Col. Allen Allensworth. He established the town in 1908, when it became the first and only California town founded and operated by blacks.

Some residents -- about 120 families live in the town of Allensworth -- also complained, saying they feared potential health impacts.

Still, Tulare County supervisors tentatively approved the project in December, saying Etchegaray would have to adhere to strict guidelines and that opponents' concerns were based on emotions, not facts.

The proposal goes before the board for final approval March 20.

Assembly Member Wilmer Amina Carter, D-Rialto, who is taking the lead on AB 576, said she and fellow legislators want the board to delay final approval and allow time for a resolution between all parties involved.

Carter said Tulare County supervisors have done their best to make the decision from a local perspective, but as a state legislator she has to look out for the interests of all Californians.

"It's a one-of-a-kind park, and it's a landmark," Carter said. "It has the potential to be developed into something that could be used for something educational."

But Tulare County Supervisor Connie Conway, whose district covers the park, said she's troubled that AB 576 would allow the state to restrict land use and make more than 60,000 acres of agricultural land off limits.

She described it as "eminent domain without payment" and said the state "insinuates themselves into local government enough."

"It would be precedent-setting, and local governments would say, 'What's next?' " Conway said.

Board Chairman Allen Ishida said authors of the bill haven't thought about its ramifications. He questions whether the legislation will gain enough support to make it to the governor's desk.

"I think you're going to see 58 counties stand up against this bill," he said.

Tulare County supervisors aren't the only local leaders concerned about the bill. Supervisors in neighboring Kings County also oppose the bill.

Kings County Supervisor Tony Oliveira said bill authors are trying to circumvent Tulare County's process and called the measure "one of the greatest slaps in the face."

"We are a home-rule state," he said. "This defies everything that we stand for."

But Sen. Florez said the bill isn't an "affront" to supervisors and that state elected officials have to step in when local leaders cater to industry instead of residents.

"This is actually a defense for people who want to have an environment that is free from odor and flies," he said.

He said counties haven't done enough to mitigate dairy impacts. He'd like to see AB 576 extend beyond protecting the Allensworth park, including other parks and schools, and may work to amend it.

Florez attempted such legislation in 2003. Among other things, it would have created three-mile buffers between new dairies and schools. He dropped the bill after it stalled in the Assembly.

"There's no doubt that I think this bill, if signed by the governor, should be extended," he said. "I'm a supporter of it for the museum's sake, absolutely, but I think it's a larger issue."

Assembly Member Parra did not return calls regarding the bill but issued a written statement. She said she supports the dairy industry and the Board of Supervisors land-use process, but she also is sympathetic to community concerns.

"It is my hope that my involvement with this legislation will put me in a position to facilitate a compromise that will satisfy the needs of two communities I care deeply about," the statement read.

AB 576 may be moot in the case of Allensworth if a compromise is reached between the Trust for Public Land and Etchegaray, who submitted his dairy application in 1998.

The two parties are finalizing two options: acquiring a deed restricting dairies and other confined livestock operations; or buying about 2,600 acres of Etchegaray's 4,400 acres, said Erik Vink, Central Valley program director with the Trust for Public Land.

But that agreement is contingent on a land appraisal expected to take four months.

David Albers, attorney for Etchegaray, confirmed his client has agreed on the appraisal process and is committed to continuing negotiations.

The Trust for Public Land was asked by the California Department of Parks and Recreation to step in and negotiate the possible purchase.

The national nonprofit trust works to preserve open land and helps government agencies and organizations acquire such land. It does not own or manage land.

The parks system, which operates the Allensworth park, has been one of the biggest opponents of the dairy project, showing up during several public hearings last year. It has invested $13 million since 2000 in the Allensworth site.

Park officials argued odor and flies would lead to the demise of the park and keep visitors away. In addition, the park system has plans to possibly expand the park, which saw about 8,400 visitors-- or 23 a day -- during the 2004-05 fiscal year.

Roy Stearns, deputy director of communications for state parks, said the agency is not taking a position on AB 576.

He is more concerned that the proposed legislation will derail negotiations and disrupt a deal that could "bear fruit" for everyone involved.

A hidden past
By Seth Nidever
Hanford Sentinel, Sunday, March 11, 2007

To some passing motorists on Highway 43, the barren southwestern corner of Tulare County is a place to get through as quickly as possible.

But to many in the Bay Area, Los Angeles and beyond, it represents a living part of U.S. history imperiled by a proposal to build two mega-dairies here.

Normally, putting cows in such a remote spot wouldn't appear as a news story in USA Today and the New York Times, let alone The Sentinel.

This isn't a normal location.

The proposed dairies would go next to Col. Allensworth State Historic Park, a site commemorating the only self-sustaining African-American town California has ever seen.

At first glance, it seems a more likely spot for dairy cows than a window into American history.

Alkali flatland stretches in every direction. Fields of spotty alfalfa shimmer in the distance. Already in March, there is hint of the relentless sun that will bake this landscape in shadeless heat during the summer months.

The nearest amenities are a gas station and mini-mart seven miles away on Highway 99.

But the state park situated in this featureless terrain allows a glimpse into an important and bittersweet part of the American past.

"For me, it's a symbol of how people can survive even at the darkest of times," said Judy Horn, an African-American leader in Kings County and director of Hand-in-Hand Family Resource Center.

Founded in 1908 by Col. Allen Allensworth, then the highest ranking black in the U.S. military, the town of Allensworth became a beacon for blacks seeking refuge from discrimination and racism.

Allensworth had escaped from slavery to fight in the Union Navy during the Civil War. He went on to serve in the U.S. Army as a chaplain, eventually rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Inspired by Allensworth, many blacks took on the task of building and running a community to prove to themselves and to white Americans that they were equal to the task.

So the town of Allensworth rose up to become a symbol of black self-sufficiency.

The town saw its heyday from 1908 to 1918. Its location on the main north-south Santa Fe rail line, its apparently plentiful water and the enthusiasm of its residents helped overcome the hardship of starting from scratch in a desolate place.

The settlement quickly developed a hotel, several thriving businesses, a school and several hundred residents.

But it didn't last long. The formerly gushing wells began to dry up, making farming more and more difficult. Then, in 1914, the railroad switched its rail stop to the town of Alpaugh.

It wasn't a coincidence, according to Charles Allen, a 74-year-old black man who lives in the town of Allensworth and does volunteer work in the park.

According to Allen, the railroad shifted to Alpaugh because it refused to hire black workers to staff the Allensworth stop.

But whatever the motive, the move severed the town's economic backbone. Then came the sudden death of Col. Allensworth in late 1914. From then on, the town experienced a steady decline that World War I, the Great Depression and World War II only accelerated.

The town might have disappeared altogether, but a group of supporters that included former residents banded together and pushed for its preservation. The result was state historic site designation in 1976.

Since then, several buildings have been reconstructed. The park is the site of various special events, the biggest of which occurs in October to mark the town's founding and in February in recognition of Black History Month.

Still, few local residents seem to know about it.

"You have to kind of find us," said ranger Joe Ramos.

Jerelyn Oliveira, a park aide, said visitors have hailed from as far away as Denmark, France and Japan.

"You know, this is California history," she said.

Oliveira takes particular pleasure in showing visitors the two-room schoolhouse constructed in 1912. The building educated children, hosted plays, saw music concerts, served as a church and survived as a symbol of Allensworth's dream.

"People who were up against so much were able to create what many people thought they couldn't do," Oliveira said.

To Allen, who maintains a residence among the few people who live in homes adjacent to the park grounds, the park provides a spiritual connection to the past that informs the present.

"History is important. If you lose history, you lose everything," Allen said.

Allen hopes the park teaches black visitors that "they are pretty strong people who (can) go against a lot of opposition."

But he also believes it has a role to play for all visitors.

"It's just some parts of history that need to be told and need to be known," he said.

State asks for delay in dairy approval
Agency steps into Allensworth dairy dispute
By Jed Chernabaeff, Staff writer
Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, March 10, 1007

A state agency has asked the Tulare County Board of Supervisors to delay a final vote on the granting of permits for a pair of dairies within two miles of Col. Allensworth State Historic Park.

It's a move that could seriously affect negotiations between land-conservation group Trust for Public Land and landowner Sam Etchegaray, those involved said. Final permit approval for the dairies - and the more than 12,000 cows that would occupy them - is scheduled for March 20.

At least two supervisors contacted Friday appeared to oppose the delay.

Opposition to the dairies comes primarily from African Americans from the Bay Area and Southern California. They consider the park a historic cultural site - akin to Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts - because it was the location of the first African-American community established in California.

The dispute has attracted national attention, with stories appearing in USA TODAY, the Los Angeles Times, the San Francisco Chronicle and, this week, the New York Times.

The supervisors tentatively approved the project on Dec. 20, two weeks after the State Parks Department offered to pay Etchegaray not to establish dairies on land near the site. The department enlisted Trust for Public Land to negotiate a deal with Etchegaray's lawyer, David Albers, to buy the 2,691 acres of land the dairies would be located on or acquire a conservation easement that would prohibit agricultural use.

Members of the California Legislative Black Caucus introduced legislation Feb. 21 that would ban dairies within five miles of the park.

Supervisors in Tulare and Kings counties have labeled the legislation an infringement on local land-use decisions. The Kings County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution Tuesday that opposed the legislation.

Both sides in the negotiations have agreed on the selection of an appraiser. That appraisal, however, will not be completed until May.

The State Parks Department submitted a March 2 letter to the Board of Supervisors asking for the postponement of the March 20 vote until July, giving both parties time to consider the appraisal and negotiate the terms of an agreement.

But such a delay would have a serious effect on the appraiser's evaluation of the land, said Erik Vink, spokesman with the Trust for Public Land.

Land with a dairy permit is more valuable than land without one, Vink said.

"How much more [would it be worth]? I don't know," Vink said. "It's safe to say that the appraisal will probably be more than the state would prefer to pay."

Roy Stearns, a spokesman for the California Department of Parks and Recreation, said the intent of the letter was not to get the state a better deal on Etchegaray's land.

"I don't think we are trying to reduce the value of this man's property," Stearns said. "We don't want to inflate it or deflate it inappropriately."

Stearns said he wasn't sure that the dairy permits would have that much of an effect on the land's value.

Attorney Albers said Etchegaray will likely ask the supervisors to go forward with the March 20 vote.

"Our position has been that a vote needs to take place," Albers said.

Supervisor Allen Ishida said delaying the vote would punish Etchegaray.

"The state needs to pay fair market price for that property," he said. "They are trying to deny the applicant the value of his property."

Supervisor Phil Cox said the state agency doesn't have the authority to request a delay. He said he's looking forward to a March 20 vote.

"I don't want to delay anymore," Cox said. "I think [Etchegaray] deserves an answer."

Lodi votes to help build plant
By Jeff Hood - Lodi Bureau Chief
Stockton Record, March 08, 2007

LODI - Lodi Mayor Bob Johnson lashed out at critics of the city's electric utility after one resident watchdog asked the City Council to delay spending $1.93 million on pre-construction costs of a 255-megawatt power plant near Interstate 5.

After Ann Cerney told council members the community had not been adequately briefed on plans to build the largest electricity-generating plant in San Joaquin County, Johnson told Cerney - the only person in the Carnegie Forum audience other than city staffers and the press - the city cannot wait.

"We have been through a lot of turmoil relative to the electric utility department," Johnson said. "We've gone from the brink of disaster to pulling this back to the real world.

"We're told, on a day-to-day basis, that we're totally inept and don't know what we're doing. We've hired new management. We've done things that have never been done. We are doing things to right the ship. We could wait for weeks for people to come into the room with a legal pad full of questions. Nobody will come."

Shortly after his rant, the City Council voted 5-0 to join other members of the Northern California Power Agency, a coalition of municipal utilities, in spending $14 million before construction could begin on the plant, which in late 2005 had an estimated cost of $212 million. The $14 million would go toward engineering costs, studies, some permitting costs and the purchase of air pollution credits.

Lodi would use 30 megawatts of the 255 megawatts the plant would generate, city officials said. The plant, scheduled to start producing electricity from natural gas in mid-2011, would provide Lodi with two-thirds of the power it does not have lined up through long-term contracts. The remaining third would have to be purchased on the power market.

Eleven other municipal utilities are expected to help pay for the plant, with Roseville, Santa Clara and the Modesto Irrigation District tentatively subscribing for 50 megawatts each.

"The purpose of this plant is to ... avoid the risk of the open market," City Manager Blair King said. "The better job we do managing risk, the better job we do managing the rates."

Lodi and the Northern California Power Agency already jointly own a 49-megawatt power plant at White Slough, but the plant rarely operates because it typically costs more for Lodi to make electricity there than to buy it from power brokers.

District: Crematory meets air standards
Neighbors fear increased cancer risk from sixth incinerator at Fremont facility
By Chris De Benedetti, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, March 12, 2007

FREMONT - Despite adding a new incinerator that may increase its burning activity, an Irvington crematory still will meet air quality standards, according to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

However, some parents with children at nearby schools remain steamed over the change.

The Irvington Memorial Cemetery and Crematory's sixth incinerator will have the capacity by itself to cremate 2,300 bodies a year. Added to its five other incinerators, the oldest of which dates back to the 1960s, the new one would increase the crematory's overall annual capacity to more than 8,300 bodies per year, according to the air quality district.

The new incinerator would give the crematory's emissions an estimated maximum cancer risk of eight in a million, according to district documents obtained by The Argus, a sister paper of the Herald.

However, that figure still complies with the San Francisco-based district's level of acceptable maximum cancer risk, which is 10 in a million. That spurred district officials to issue a permit to the crematory, said Dharam Singh, a district air quality engineer.

In addition, Fremont officials have issued a construction building permit to the crematory for the new incinerator. The city could not deny the permit because the Irvington business has a use permit for operating as a crematory, said Jill Keimach, Fremont Community DevelopmentDirector. City officials say they have been talking to crematory owner Robert Rose on how best to use the business' six incinerators.

"The only thing we can do is use persuasion," Keimach said. "There is no regulatory process (for the city). We have no control over it."

There is no safety hazard connected to the new incinerator because it is more efficient and has less emissions, crematory owner Robert Rose recently said.

But Rosemary Yoshikawa, whose son attends nearby Horner Junior High School, worries that the growing burning capacity creates the potential for air pollution that would harm schoolchildren.

More than 1,400 Fremont children attend schools within four blocks of the crematory: Horner Junior High School, Hirsch Elementary School and the Seneca Center. In addition, Irvington High School, which is also near the crematory, has nearly 2,000 students.

As long as it meets the standards of the air quality district, "we don't think there's any cause for concern," Fremont Unified School District spokesman Gary Leatherman said. "We err on the far side of caution in these matters, and there doesn't appear to be any health hazard, as far as we know."

Bruce Funk, parent of a Horner Junior High School student, said he is disappointed with the school district's response. "You would think that the school district would want to weigh in on an issue that will affect the air quality of district students and (teachers)," Funk said.

But Fremont mortuary owner Kevin Smith disagrees. Smith, owner of Berge-Pappas-Smith Mortuary, said he contracts with Irvington Memorial and annually sends about 150 to 175 bodies there to be cremated.

"They do a great job," Smith said. "They're timely, they're clean. They put out less pollutants than other crematories and other industries."

Crematories get a bad rap, he said, adding that the fast food and trucking industries, by comparison, emit far more pollutants. However, Yoshikawa remains concerned.

"This growing incinerating facility happens to be close to three schools," Yoshikawa said. "Should it continue to grow when it emits toxins out of those stacks? Should we allow it to increase capacity?"

Power plant may pollute Hayward
Air quality credit system sets double standard of compliance
By Matt O'Brien, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, March 11, 2007

HAYWARD - Supporters of a proposed Hayward power plant expect to achieve an important victory this spring when the Bay Area Air Quality Management District releases a report that says the project meets environmental standards.

But that doesn't mean the gas-burning Eastshore Energy Center won't pollute Hayward's air.

Brian Lusher, an air district engineer, revealed this week that the Eastshore plant will meet all of the agency's "rules and regulations" because the plant developer, Texas-based Tierra Energy, can make up for the pollution it creates by buying credits to reduce pollution elsewhere.

"We're a regional agency so we try to take into account the regional effects," Lusher said.

Lusher's brief comments, revealed only after intense grilling by a Hayward city councilman during a crowded Tuesday hearing, marked the first time most Hayward residents knew anything about the credit program.

According to documents obtained Friday from the California Energy Commission, the commission's executive director, B.B. Blevins, has allowed Tierra to keep details of its proposed credit exchange confidential because the information is a potential "trade secret" that, if revealed, could damage the company's comparative advantage over rival developers.

Blevins, in a Dec. 21 letter to Tierra attorney Jane Luckhardt, wrote that it was "reasonable" and in the "public interest" for Tierra to keep the information classified.

But, he continued, it should only remain confidential "until that point when public participation in review of your proposed offsets becomes necessary."

Whether that public discussion has begun yet has been a point of contention in Hayward.

Officially, according to the Blevins' letter, it begins when the regional air quality district releases a preliminary determination on whether the Eastshore project complies with environmental standards. That report is scheduled to be released in April.

But as Hayward residents prepare for their fourth public hearing on the plantthis year - one energy commission meeting in January, one Hayward Planning Commission hearing in February and two Hayward City Council hearings this month - some residents and local officials still feel left in the dark about the true impacts the plant is likely to have on the area.

Michael Toth, who lives less than a mile downwind from the Clawiter Road site where Tierra wants to build the plant, said the credit exchange means his neighborhood will bear an unfair level of pollution.

"The purchase of credit essentially allows a company to move pollution from one part of the Bay Area to another," Toth said. "I don't think the laws in this state have recognized the problems that can be created as an abuse of the credit system."

Gerard Clum, president of Life Chiropractic College West, located directly across the railroad tracks from the site, is also skeptical.

"I think the biggest thing from where I sit is with the particulate matter discharge," Clum said. "(Credits) are fine for the region, but it doesn't do much for Hayward."

The Hayward City Council is scheduled to vote on the proposed power plant on Tuesday. The majority appears strongly opposed to it and likely to shoot it down. But the council has been tasked to look mostly at land-use and zoning issues, not environmental concerns.

Greg Trewitt, a Tierra vice president and engineer, said credits will play an important role in the project's compliance, as it does with power plant projects throughout the state.

Trewitt said the chief concern Tierra must address is with fine particulate matter, which, unlike other problem pollutants, is typically a bigger problem during the winter. Eastshore will be a peaker plant, designed especially for summer periods of peak energy demand.

But Hayward and most of the surrounding region is already in a "nonattainment" status for particulate matter, meaning the pollution is already at levels considered unacceptable, according to the air district. Anything added to that mix must be mitigated.

Trewitt said that along with buying credits, the company is looking at paying for some kind of "fireplace retrofit" program for local residents.

The City Council will vote at 8 p.m. Tuesday at City Hall, Council Chambers, 777 B St., Hayward.

State law gives responsibility over studying and regulating power plant emissions to the regional air district and the state energy commission. The commission, not local leaders, has final authority on whether Tierra gets a license to build the plant.

The energy commission has scheduled a five-hour "issue resolution workshop" beginning at 3 p.m. March 19, also at City Hall, in Room 2A.

And the developer, Tierra Energy, is holding a community meeting at 7 p.m. April 16 at Life Chiropractic College West, 25001 Industrial Blvd., Hayward.
All three meetings are open to the public.

Report cites risk of offshore gas terminal near Malibu
Agencies express concerns about the impact on air quality and marine life of the proposed liquefied natural gas facility. They also assess the danger from possible explosion and fire.

By Gary Polakovic, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Saturday, March 10, 2007

A comprehensive study released Friday on a natural gas processing plant that would be built in the ocean about 20 miles from Malibu concludes that the project poses substantial environmental and safety concerns for the California coast.

BHP Billiton, one of the largest energy companies in the world, wants its $800-million terminal to become the portal through which California receives natural gas from Australia. The Bush administration has endorsed offshore gas terminals, as have many business leaders. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger — expected to have final say over the proposal by summer — has given the project qualified support.

With several regulatory hearings on the project set to begin, the report says the terminal would significantly affect air quality, ocean views and marine life. It also concludes that an accident could affect ships heading to or departing from the nation's busiest port complex, at Los Angeles and Long Beach harbors.

The findings are contained in a 3,000-page final environmental impact report prepared by the U.S. Coast Guard, California State Lands Commission and U.S. Maritime Administration. The document will play a key role in a series of hearings over the next 70 days that will determine whether the facility will be the first liquefied natural gas terminal built on the West Coast.

Environmentalists and local officials have vigorously opposed the project and say the findings prove it should be scrapped. They say they will urge Schwarzenegger to reject it and will ask California lawmakers to work for its defeat.

"It still has many problems," said Susan Jordan, director of the California Coastal Protection Network. And because of that, she said, "this project should be denied."

But BHP Billiton officials say their project, Cabrillo Port, is good for California. They say that it would provide energy to boost the state's economy and that natural gas is the least-polluting fossil fuel available.

"Cabrillo Port will be built to the highest public safety and environmental standards and will provide clean, safe, reliable energy to meet Ventura County's and California's ever-growing energy needs," said Renee Klimczak, president of BHP Billiton LNG International Inc.

The terminal would consist of a 971-foot-long gas-processing vessel moored 14 miles offshore between Malibu and Port Hueneme and connected to the mainland by underwater pipes. It would process about 800 million cubic feet of natural gas daily for use in homes, factories and power plants. The gas would be pumped from fields overseas, chilled and shipped in tankers across the ocean, then heated to become vapor again for use in California.

But the terminal and its ships would emit about 219 tons of ozone-forming emissions and 35 tons of smoke and soot daily — ranking it as one of the biggest air pollution sources for Ventura County. Southern California air quality officials have expressed concerns that the project could add to pollution in the Los Angeles region.

To reduce air pollution, the company has agreed to use advanced technology at the floating processing plant, power the tankers and tugboats with clean-burning fuels and offset the remaining emissions by cleaning up two other tugboats that push barges up and down the California coast.

"BHP Billiton is proposing extensive mitigation that will result in an improvement to the region's air quality," Klimczak said.

But the environmental document concludes that the company, working with the California Air Resources Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has failed to show it can reduce emissions to an insignificant level.

Air pollution has been a contentious issue surrounding the project. The EPA initially required that the company reduce more than its share of emissions, but the agency reversed itself in June 2005 without explanation after BHP Billiton officials lobbied the White House Task Force on Energy Project Streamlining. Since then, the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District has told the EPA that the project must meet the original rigorous cleanup standards, the same limits that would apply if the project were built on land.

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Los Angeles), chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, is investigating the matter. In a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson on Monday, he charged that EPA political appointees in Washington overruled the EPA staff in San Francisco, which had insisted on stringent emissions controls for the project.

On Friday, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Rep. Lois Capps (D-Santa Barbara) wrote to Johnson demanding a full accounting of the EPA reversal as well as documents that they say the agency has been unwilling to provide to Waxman.

On other issues, the report identifies a hazard from possible explosion and fire. If another vessel crashed into the terminal at high speed — an event the study deems improbable — liquefied natural gas would probably spill into the ocean beyond a 1,640-foot safety zone.

A safety study conducted by Sandia National Laboratories concluded that, in a worst-case scenario, an attack on the terminal could rupture two of the three natural gas holding tanks, releasing about 200,000 cubic meters of fuel. It would unleash a powerful and spectacular fireball across the water, spreading more than seven miles and damaging any recreational boaters or ships navigating the nearby Santa Barbara Channel. But the explosion would end 6.6 miles from land, causing no damage to people onshore, the study found.

The report also says the risk of such a catastrophe is slight. The company plans to patrol waters around the terminal and employ safety training and equipment. In the 40 years that the liquefied natural gas industry has been operating, fewer than 20 marine accidents have occurred worldwide, and none resulted in a significant release of natural gas, the report says.

The report also identifies noise as a serious problem that would be noticeable to boaters within three miles of the terminal and loud enough to interfere with personal conversations within about half a mile. Noise from construction and operation of the facility — including helicopters, ships and machinery — could affect marine mammals. The report calls for greater use of sound-reducing technologies and changes in operations during gray whale migrations.

The document also says the plant could be an eyesore for boaters, whale watchers and visitors to nearby Channel Islands National Park. At night, lights from the operation would be visible from homes in Malibu. The study says the project would "cause a long-term significant adverse change in the visual character of the open ocean."

The study concludes that although many of the impacts can be mitigated, a number "would remain significant and unavoidable."

Energy development along the Southern California coast has been controversial, especially since the 1969 Union Oil Co. petroleum spill that fouled Santa Barbara beaches and was a catalyst for the environmental movement of the 1970s.

Nevertheless, President Bush, Schwarzenegger and energy industry leaders endorse importing natural gas to diversify energy sources and meet demand. Growth in California adds about 550,000 residents annually.

Completion of the environmental report triggers a series of regulatory hearings mandated under the Deepwater Port Act that will determine the fate of the project.

The State Lands Commission will hold a hearing on the matter April 9, and the California Coastal Commission will review the project at its April 10-13 meeting in Santa Barbara. On April 4, the Coast Guard and the Maritime Administration will hold a public hearing at the Performing Arts Center in Oxnard. That hearing starts a countdown of 45 days, by the end of which Schwarzenegger is required to render a decision on the project.

The governor has said he will not take an official position until reviews are complete, but in 2005 he expressed a "personal preference" for the project. Schwarzenegger once met with Australian Prime Minister John Howard — the land down under stands to earn $15 billion if the project is approved — to discuss the proposal. And members of the governor's Cabinet took an 11-day energy tour of Australia and Asia in 2004 paid by a foundation supported by the energy industry. BHP Billiton spent $1.8 million in California lobbying for its project last year — the seventh-highest expenditure among special-interest groups, according to the secretary of state.

Natural gas plant bad for Malibu, study says
Associated Press LA Daily News
March 11, 2007

MALIBU - A study on a natural gas plant proposed off the coast of Malibu has concluded that the plant would significantly affect air quality, ocean views and marine life.

One of the world's largest energy companies, Australian-based BHP Billiton LNG International Inc., is seeking to build a terminal off the coast of Malibu and Oxnard. BHP officials say the facility would provide a reliable source of low-polluting energy.

"Cabrillo Port will be built to the highest public safety and environmental standards and will provide clean, safe, reliable energy to meet Ventura County's and California's ever-growing energy needs," BHP President Renee Klimczak said.

But opponents have said the terminal would not meet clean-air requirements and could be a terrorist target. A host of celebrities who live in Malibu, including Pierce Brosnan and Halle Berry, have protested the facility.

The 3,000-page final environmental impact report will play a key role in a series of upcoming hearings on whether the plant will be the first natural gas terminal built on the West Coast. In addition to raising environmental concerns, the report also raised safety concerns.

Europe gets tougher on climate control
Elizabeth Bryant, Chronicle Foreign Service
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, March 10, 2007

Paris -- Along with specials to Luxor and Sidney, French tour operator Voyageurs du Monde is pitching a more unusual offer: For an extra $40, clients can help offset their share of Earth-warming carbon dioxide spewed into the atmosphere by airliners jetting them to holiday getaways.

"Obviously, it's good for our business when we know that 85 percent of our clients look for companies that are environmentally correct," said Voyageurs head Jean-Francois Rial, who hopes to raise nearly $5 million in donations this year for climate-friendly projects in developing countries. "But our goal is also to save our planet for our children."

All of Europe officially agrees with that goal. The 27 nations of the European Union adopted rules on Friday requiring that one-fifth of all energy used come from renewable sources by 2020.

While key details remain to be worked out, the EU plan calls for specific targets rather than the voluntary cutbacks on greenhouse gases advocated by the Bush administration. The new rules go further than the pollution-reduction requirements of the Kyoto Protocol, which went into effect without U.S. participation.

"We assume leadership with this unilateral reduction," French President Jacques Chirac said Friday at the EU summit in Brussels. "This is part of the great moments of European history."

European governments and businesses already are investing in an arsenal of emissions-cutting ventures. Wind turbines are mushrooming across rugged hills in Spain and Scotland. Bicycle lanes slicethrough Paris and Berlin. Clean-energy investment is blossoming, and the 27-member European Union is mulling ambitious goals to cut emissions to 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2020-- beyond Kyoto Protocol targets -- along with its dependence on imported fossil fuel.

But as California embarks on its own emissions-cutting efforts, analysts say Europe also offers a sobering lesson of flawed objectives and unfilled promises.

"There's a big gap between thinking and action, and more leadership in concept than on the ground," said former EU Environmental Director Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, echoing the conclusion of other experts.

"Hard choices still remain."

Europe already has established the world's largest mandatory emissions trading system-- a scheme that offers polluters market-based incentives to reduce greenhouse gases. By setting caps and allowing industries to buy and sell carbon credits on the market, the system is designed to encourage businesses to pollute less -- or at least to mitigate their emissions by investing in reforestation or other carbon dioxide-reducing projects.

"Other countries are finding it very difficult to meet their Kyoto targets, but the EU is taking this incredibly seriously," said Beverly Darkin, a climate change expert at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, a London think tank. "The fact we've got an EU-wide emissions trading scheme demonstrates our willingness to put regulatory measures in place to tackle the problem."

Critics argue the trading system hurts European competitiveness, while supporters predict the 2-year-old venture will drive future emissions cuts and a rush in green investment.

Most agree, however, that it remains a work in progress.

"Emissions trading has created a sea change in public opinion and business thinking, but it remains largely symbolic," said Carlo Jaeger, a leading climate specialist at Potsdam University in Germany. "In terms of actual emissions reductions, this has been a missed opportunity."

Experts like Jaeger fault many European governments for offering companies overly generous caps, thereby giving them little incentive to conserve rather than trade. The EU is cracking down, as it sets caps for the 2008-2012 trading period. But the scheme includes only the largest polluters -- steel, power and cement, for example -- that account for roughly 40 percent of Europe's carbon emissions.

Left out of the equation are industries that produce the other 60 percent -- such as agriculture and road transportation -- although the EU plans to enforce emissions quotas for another greenhouse culprit, airline companies, by 2011.

While polls show many Europeans consider climate change a major threat, green rhetoric by their leaders is nuanced by powerful interests at home. Chancellor Angela Merkel has made global warming a top priority during Germany's current EU presidency but has balked at imposing speed limits on her nation's autobahns. And a recent EU proposal to impose mandatory carbon dioxide emissions for new vehicles was watered down under pressure from car manufacturers.

"It's hurting competitiveness," said Margo Thorning, managing director of the International Council for Capital Formation, a conservative think tank in Brussels that opposes the EU's emissions-cutting plans. "And this really isn't going to do much in terms of global emissions reductions."

Without significant pollution-cutting actions by the United States and major developing countries like China and India, Thorning and other critics argue, unilateral European efforts are useless. Even in Europe, newer EU members such as Lithuania fear stricter controls will hurt economic growth.

But as energy entrepreneurs in California have noted, there is money to be made from greener legislation. "If we go further on climate-change policy, that will drive innovation, and that will create economic opportunities," said Fanny Calder, facilitator for Britain's Corporate Leaders Group on Climate Change, a group of local and international business executives lobbying for tougher emission-cutting measures.

Some businesses are already reaping windfalls. In France, renewable energy company EDF Energies Nouvelles saw its shares surge 18 percent during its first day of trading in November. "We're growing very quickly," said EDF's David Corchia, whose company operates in nine countries and is enjoying a robust 30 percent annual growth.

Others are earning an image boost from going green. The British supermarket chain Tesco is creating a "carbon footprint," allowing customers to evaluate the amount of carbon in the products they buy. Entities as varied as the Norwegian government and the Swiss-based international soccer association FIFA are buying carbon credits on the market to offset their emissions from air travel.

British economist Nicolas Stern, who wrote an influential government report last year on climate change, told the International Herald Tribune recently that Europe's carbon trading may grow to $30 billion, from its present $1 billion level.

"There's an enormous interest," in emissions trading, said Frank Brannvoll, the Brussels managing director for Point Carbon, a consulting group specializing in the energy market. "Climate is now part of everyday conversation. This makes many companies want to jump in."

In Paris, Voyageurs du Monde's Rial says 8 percent of his customers have signed onto his carbon-offsetting program. However small, he argues, their contribution will make a difference.

"Of course, we are minor compared to the global problem," Rial said. "But we have the capacity to influence people which goes beyond our size."

EU sharpens its focus

New European Union targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions and using more renewable energy:

-- Greenhouse gases

Now: 15 EU nations have agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 8 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. Most of the hard work will take place in the next five years as major carbon polluters -- heavy industry and power plants -- trade carbon-dioxide allowances that encourage them to cut emissions.

New: All 27 EU nations will cut overall greenhouse gas emissions to 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. There would be a 30 percent cut if other world regions join in.

-- Renewable energy

Now: The EU is likely to miss a target to generate 12 percent of all energy from renewable sources by 2010. In 2005, the EU got to 6 percent overall.

New: A binding target will force countries to invest heavily to draw 20 percent of all power from renewables by 2020. The EU said it will agree on individual targets with each country to take into account "different starting positions."

-- Biofuels

Now: The EU is also not on track to meet a 2010 target to use 5.75 percent of biofuels in transport fuel. The EU forecasts that at best biofuels will gain a 4.2 percent share in three years.

New: The EU wants to set a mandatory target for biofuels to replace 10 percent of transport gasoline and diesel by 2020, which will demand a rapid scale-up of technology to derive fuel from sugar and plant oil crops.

-- Reducing energy use

Now: No target, although voluntary programs and campaigns promote lower-power appliances.

New: The EU set a range of actions to cut energy use 13 percent below current levels by promoting more efficient appliances, lighting and heating, including a plan to require energy-saving street lighting and lightbulbs in homes and offices. It will push for international cuts in energy consumption.

Ferry service touted as transit alternative
Authority wants to expand annual use from 3.5 million to 12 million with additional routes
By Erik N. Nelson, Medianews Staff
In the Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Sunday, March 11, 2007

By 2010, the Bay Area Water Transit Authority expects that a knot of commuters will be walking up the gangplank of a ferry terminal in Berkeley. The question is, will people embrace the alternative while BART, buses and the Bay Bridge all compete for their attention?

And even then, is it a good idea?

So far, the authority is trying to figure out where to dock the ferry and what environmental impact each of its locations would have.

On Thursday evening, a small collection of Berkeley residents gathered at the North Berkeley Senior Center, many to voice displeasure with two sites near Golden Gate Fields in Albany, citing the impact on wildlife, and the lack of existing public transit connections at the proposed Berkeley Marina site.

The Berkeley service is part of the authority's plan to expand ferry ridership from the current 3.5 million per year on 10 routes to 12 million with the addition of routes serving San Francisco from Antioch and Martinez, Hercules, Redwood City, Richmond and Treasure Island, as well as an Oakland-to-South San Francisco route.

Whichever site comes out on top after the $1 million environmental impact study is completed, it appears that ferry service enjoys plenty of support among Bay Area residents, in spite of some glaring contrasts with other forms of public transit.

A survey of 600 Berkeley voters in 2005 showed three-fourths thought the service was a good idea. The Sierra Club supports service from the Berkeley Marina at the end of University Avenue. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District supports free ferry service on "Spare the Air" days, intended to keep cars off the road and reduce smog.

But the idea that ferries stave off smog is simply not true, as even the Water Transit Authority acknowledges in a study. With lax regulation of ferry emissions and major improvements in automobile engines during the last few decades, most ferries pollute more.

"Ferries as they exist today really aren't that great as far as emissions go," said Steve Castleberry, the authority's chief executive officer.

The authority has worked to change that, however, and requires its new ferries to use a catalytic converter that makes them 10 times cleaner than their older fleetmates.

Even then, Castleberry explained, the comparison is a mixed bag, with some ferry pollutants better than those that would be produced by the cars that a full load of ferry commuters would otherwise be driving, and some worse. And it could be 20 years before the rest of the fleet needs replacement with the cleaner vessels, he said.

Even if it isn't the answer to the area's smoggy summer days, ferry service is attractive to commuters for a number of other reasons.

It provides a bright, open-air alternative to the confines of BART's Transbay Tube. It's a relaxing communal alternative -- complete with snacks, Wi-Fi, alcoholic beverages and bathrooms -- to the solitary frustrations of driving across the Bay Bridge.

And then there's the bike issue.

"I have some members who are not real crazy about more power boats on the Bay, spewing exhaust and possibly churning up wildlife, but there is a limited capacity on many of the systems, or just outright barriers to us," said Robert Raburn, executive director of the East Bay Bicycle Coalition.

It's the "outright barriers" that are particularly frustrating, because they exist on the most popular alternative to driving across the Bay: BART. During rush hour, BART doesn't allow bicycles on its crowded trains as they speed through the tube.

Buses do allow bicycles, but most of them only two at a time on its front bike racks. AC Transit recently started permitting drivers to put two additional bikes in luggage compartments, but it's a far cry from the wide-open spaces that ferries can provide bicyclists.

"We're going to put racks for 25 bikes on these things," Castleberry said of the new Berkeley boats, which are being built to serve as backups for the Bay's existing 10 routes until the Berkeley service begins.

Climate Report Warns of Drought, Disease
By SETH BORENSTEIN, The Associated Press
Washington Post, March 11, 2007

WASHINGTON -- The harmful effects of global warming on daily life are already showing up, and within a couple of decades hundreds of millions of people won't have enough water, top scientists will say next month at a meeting in Belgium.

At the same time, tens of millions of others will be flooded out of their homes each year as the Earth reels from rising temperatures and sea levels, according to portions of a draft of an international scientific report obtained by The Associated Press.

Tropical diseases like malaria will spread. By 2050, polar bears will mostly be found in zoos, their habitats gone. Pests like fire ants will thrive.

For a time, food will be plentiful because of the longer growing season in northern regions. But by 2080, hundreds of millions of people could face starvation, according to the report, which is still being revised.

The draft document by the authoritative Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change focuses on global warming's effects and is the second in a series of four being issued this year. Written and reviewed by more than 1,000 scientists from dozens of countries, it still must be edited by government officials.

But some scientists said the overall message is not likely to change when it's issued in early April in Brussels, the same city where European Union leaders agreed this past week to drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. Their plan will be presented to President Bush and other world leaders at a summit in June.

The report offers some hope if nations slow and then reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, but it notes that what's happening now isn't encouraging.

"Changes in climate are now affecting physical and biological systems on every continent," the report says, in marked contrast to a 2001 report by the same international group that said the effects of global warming were coming. But that report only mentioned scattered regional effects.

"Things are happening and happening faster than we expected," said Patricia Romero Lankao of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., one of the many co-authors of the new report.

The draft document says scientists are highly confident that many current problems _ change in species' habits and habitats, more acidified oceans, loss of wetlands, bleaching of coral reefs, and increases in allergy-inducing pollen _ can be blamed on global warming.

For example, the report says North America "has already experienced substantial ecosystem, social and cultural disruption from recent climate extremes," such as hurricanes and wildfires.

But the present is nothing compared to the future.

Global warming soon will "affect everyone's life ... it's the poor sectors that will be most affected," Romero Lankao said.

And co-author Terry Root of Stanford University said: "We truly are standing at the edge of mass extinction" of species.

The report included these likely results of global warming:

_Hundreds of millions of Africans and tens of millions of Latin Americans who now have water will be short of it in less than 20 years. By 2050, more than 1 billion people in Asia could face water shortages. By 2080, water shortages could threaten 1.1 billion to 3.2 billion people, depending on the level of greenhouse gases that cars and industry spew into the air.

_Death rates for the world's poor from global warming-related illnesses, such as malnutrition and diarrhea, will rise by 2030. Malaria and dengue fever, as well as illnesses from eating contaminated shellfish, are likely to grow.

_Europe's small glaciers will disappear with many of the continent's large glaciers shrinking dramatically by 2050. And half of Europe's plant species could be vulnerable, endangered or extinct by 2100.

_By 2080, between 200 million and 600 million people could be hungry because of global warming's effects.

_About 100 million people each year could be flooded by 2080 by rising seas.

_Smog in U.S. cities will worsen and "ozone-related deaths from climate (will) increase by approximately 4.5 percent for the mid-2050s, compared with 1990s levels," turning a small health risk into a substantial one.

_Polar bears in the wild and other animals will be pushed to extinction.

_At first, more food will be grown. For example, soybean and rice yields in Latin America will increase starting in a couple of years. Areas outside the tropics, especially the northern latitudes, will see longer growing seasons and healthier forests.

Looking at different impacts on ecosystems, industry and regions, the report sees the most positive benefits in forestry and some improved agriculture and transportation in polar regions. The biggest damage is likely to come in ocean and coastal ecosystems, water resources and coastal settlements.

The hardest-hit continents are likely to be Africa and Asia, with major harm also coming to small islands and some aspects of ecosystems near the poles. North America, Europe and Australia are predicted to suffer the fewest of the harmful effects.

"In most parts of the world and most segments of populations, lifestyles are likely to change as a result of climate change," the draft report said. "Net valuations of benefits vs. costs will vary, but they are more likely to be negative if climate change is substantial and rapid, rather than if it is moderate and gradual."

This report _ considered by some scientists the "emotional heart" of climate change research _ focuses on how global warming alters the planet and life here, as opposed to the more science-focused report by the same group last month.

"This is the story. This is the whole play. This is how it's going to affect people. The science is one thing. This is how it affects me, you and the person next door," said University of Victoria climate scientist Andrew Weaver.

Many _ not all _ of those effects can be prevented, the report says, if within a generation the world slows down its emissions of carbon dioxide and if the level of greenhouse gases sticking around in the atmosphere stabilizes. If that's the case, the report says "most major impacts on human welfare would be avoided; but some major impacts on ecosystems are likely to occur."

The United Nations-organized network of 2,000 scientists was established in 1988 to give regular assessments of the Earth's environment. The document issued last month in Paris concluded that scientists are 90 percent certain that people are the cause of global warming and that warming will continue for centuries.

Madison, Wis., Named 'Most Walkable'
By SCOTT BAUER, The Associated Press
Washington Post, March 11, 2007

MADISON, Wis. -- With the thermometer hovering at 22, and the wind ripping off a frozen Lake Mendota, Rink DaVee and his brother Jim decided to take a stroll. And why not? After all, according to a recent top 10 list, there's no better place in the country for walking than the capital city of a state known more for cheese and beer than exercising.

"It makes you feel better," DaVee said during a break in his walk Wednesday, standing on the icy, snow-covered trail that extends out over the lake. "It gets you through a cold month of March."

Prevention magazine named Madison _ 1,300 miles north of sunny Miami _ as the most walkable of the country's 100 most populated cities. The list was commissioned by the American Podiatric Medical Association based on certain criteria. It ran in editions of the magazine released this week.

Madison beat out the likes of Austin, Texas (No. 2), San Francisco (No. 3) and Miami, which barely cracked the list at No. 98.

Factors contributing to the ranking were air quality, the percentage of people who walk to work, access to parks, number of athletic shoes sold, and (believe it or not) weather.

Number of beaches versus frozen lakes apparently was not a factor. Crime rate, unfortunately for Miami, was.

Adopting a walker-friendly plan 10 years ago was a major plus for Madison, said Prevention magazine's deputy editor Karyn Repinski. That plan focused on maintaining and improving the city's walkability and requires that when roads are redeveloped, they should accommodate not just cars, but bikes and pedestrians, too.

But don't be fooled by all the signs of fitness around town. Madisonians also love their beer, bratwurst and Wisconsin cheese. The city of 250,000 plays host to a four-day extravaganza dubbed "The World's Largest Brat Fest," where nearly 200,000 brats are consumed over four days.

Madison was the only city in the walking top 10 in a state that's not in the South or the West, a point of pride for people like Kathy Andrusz, coordinator of the Fit City initiative. Started in 2003 by Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, the program is a collaboration between Madison city officials and more than 30 other groups to combat obesity and get people moving.

"We're definitely touting it," Andrusz said of the walking rating. "We're definitely proud of it and will be able to use it as a sense of pride, if nothing else."

Madison is no stranger to No. 1 rankings. People still talk about Money Magazine naming it the best place to live in 1998, although that ranking dropped to 53rd last year. Outside Magazine named it the best road biking city in August, and other high rankings have come for its being vegetarian-friendly, gay-friendly, environmentally friendly, and, well, according to Midwest Living in 2003, the overall friendliest city in the Midwest.

Even with all that love going around, who wants to break out the walking shoes in the middle of winter? Especially this winter, with snow on the ground every day since Jan. 14 and an average high temperature in February of just 21.7 degrees and an average low of 7.2 degrees. It also snowed 22 inches last month.

"Winter weather is only a barrier if you let it be," Andrusz said. "It's a matter of attitude."

Repinski, the magazine editor who spoke from New York City, which ranked 39th, said only a cynic would let a little winter weather get in the way of walking.

"I walked a mile this morning and I was walking in an inch of snow," she said. "The conditions don't have to be perfect for walking, that's what's nice about it."

Downtown Madison lies on an isthmus with Lake Mendota to the north and Lake Monona to the south. Stretching to the west from the state Capitol is State Street, which is crammed full of bars, restaurants and boutiques, but no cars. It's perfect for, you guessed it, walking.

At the west end of State Street rests the University of Wisconsin, where students are known to complain about the steep climb up Bascom Hill to the administration building, which offers a stunning view of the city and the Capitol dome.

Even with 40,000 students mostly walking to and from class _ and bars at night _ Madison has a remarkable bike trail system, with more than 30 miles of trails and 110 miles of bike lanes even on the busiest of streets. Not to mention the 6,000 acres of parkland.

Zac Stencil, 23, a senior at the university, said he walks about two miles every day to and from classes.

"You can meet cool groups of people who are walking beside you," Stencil said. "Plus, when the lakes are frozen you can walk right across."

Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Sunday, March 11, 2007

Daniel Weintraub: A market for pollution credits starts with choices

By Daniel Weintraub

As California regulatons move forward with the state's sweeping plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions, one of the big questions they will face is whether the government should sell or give away the right to dump carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Assembly Bill 32, the landmark measure passed last year to put California out front in the fight against global warming, requires the state's industries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

To get there, state regulators at the Air Resources Board are planning to order some industries to change their practices. Auto manufacturers will be required to make their cars more efficient. Utilities will be forced to produce more of their power from renewable resources. Oil companies will have to make fuels that burn with fewer carbon dioxide emissions.

At the same time, regulators hope to create a market in which companies can buy credits allowing them to pollute. The idea behind this market-based approach is to allow companies to reduce their emission of greenhouse gasses in the most efficient way possible. Some would do it by retooling. But if those measures prove too expensive, a market in pollution permits would allow firms to pay someone else to do more than their share. The state still meets its goal but with less disruption of the economy.

The question is how those credits will be distributed. And that might be a $2 billion question.

The state could simply allocate credits to individual companies based on their historic levels of pollution. Each credit would represent the right to produce, say, a ton of carbon dioxide emissions. The number of credits distributed would be less than needed to continue business as usual, forcing the firms to reduce their pollution. Companies that reduced their emissions faster than required could sell their unused credits.

An alternative would be for the state to sell all or a portion of the credits at an auction. Regulators would determine an acceptable level of greenhouse gas emissions for the entire state and put the credits representing that amount up for sale. Companies would bid for the right to pollute, with the market setting the price from the beginning.

Lenny Goldberg, executive director of the California Tax Reform Association, which lobbies for higher taxes on business, is pushing the Air Resources Board to sell the credits rather than give them away.

"If you really want to get it right, you have to have an auction," Goldberg says.

Goldberg argues that distributing the credits for free based on past patterns would reward companies that have been producing a lot of greenhouse gasses, while penalizing those firms that already have reduced their carbon footprint. The bigger polluters could even make a windfall on the deal by taking easy actions to reduce their emissions and then selling their credits to others.

An auction, on the other hand, would reward companies that have already reduced their emissions, because they would have to buy fewer credits to remain in compliance. And if the state announces ahead of time that the credits will be auctioned, companies that haven't yet acted would have an incentive to do so quickly.

Linda Adams, secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency, and Catherine Witherspoon, executive officer of the Air Resources Board, told The Bee earlier this year that they believe they have the authority to sell the credits at an auction without further legislation, and they are considering doing so. AB 32 gives the Air Resources Board the power to levy any fees needed to enforce the law.

"We don't see any need for anything else," Adams said. "We don't need any more authority."

An auction would be controversial, however, because it would be the equivalent of a tax increase raising $2 billion or more, depending on the value companies place on the credits. That money would probably be spent to help ease California's transition to a low-carbon economy. Some of it might go back to industry as rebates for improving their operations, or as subsidies for clean-burning fuels. Low-income consumers might see some of it to offset higher utility bills.

As California moves forward, regulators will keep an eye on how other jurisdictions have handled this issue. When Europe created a market for greenhouse gas credits, most of the permits were given away, and the value of the credits crashed because the governments handed out too many. That meant polluters could buy their way out of taking action for next to nothing.

In the northeastern United States, meanwhile, several states are rolling out a joint effort to cut emissions from power plants. There, the group plans to auction most if not all of the credits. Selling the credits, ironically, might turn out to be the least intrusive method of distribution, because it means regulators don't have to evaluate every company's operations to determine each firm's entitlement to permits, with all the lobbying and back-room deals that might entail.

"We'll watch them and see how it goes," Witherspoon said.

And then a lot of people will be watching California.

Fresno Bee editorial, Friday, March 9, 2007:
More climate change
Study says smog from Asia can intensify California storms.

Carbon dioxide, an invisible emission from cars and power plants, is getting the most attention when it comes to climate change, but pollutants the eye can see may be playing a bigger role than previously thought.

A new and worrisome study by the National Academy of Sciences has found that air pollution from Asia is altering storm patterns in the Pacific Ocean that head east toward California and the Pacific Northwest, making storms bigger and more dangerous.

Even worse, these warm storms, if they track toward Canada, could accelerate the melting of polar ice packs. Scary stuff.

The burning of Asian forests and the belching of Asian smokestacks is creating a massive plume of pollution that makes it to California in about two weeks, sometimes much faster. Along the way, the pollutants act as cloud-seeding agents for storms gathering in the Pacific. By reviewing satellite imagery of Pacific storm systems over the years, the researchers found an increase of as much as 50% in deep convective clouds, which can reach six miles into the sky and produce remarkable downpours and thunderstorms.

Along with all this visible pollution from Asia, the combustion is creating plenty of invisible carbon dioxide as well. The problems of climate change from greenhouse gasses and visible pollutants are essentially one in the same, just with different trouble-causing mechanisms.

That Asia’s industrial activities are having such a direct and dangerous effect on our weather is alarming and eye-opening. The world seems to be getting smaller as it is most definitely getting warmer.

Climate change not only demands a response by the United States, the biggest emitter of greenhouse gasses on the planet, but from every country. If we could only lead by example.

S.F. Chronicle commentary, Sunday, March 11, 2007:
Greenhouse gasbags have it all wrong
Cutting emissions costs too much and accomplishes little
By Henry I. Miller

We're attacking global warming with a lot of hot air -- with strategies that will never work. Although many activists have been pushing for lower emissions of greenhouse gases, what we really need is resilience and adaptation.

Significant reductions of emissions will be too costly, too little and too late. Reductions in the burning of fossil fuels sufficient to have even a modest impact would stifle economic growth and plunge the world into chaos. In any case, discernible effects on warming would be decades away.

In addition, as pointed out recently in an article in the journal Nature by University of Colorado environmental studies Professor Roger Pielke Jr. and his collaborators, "Vulnerability to climate-related impacts on society is increasing for reasons that have nothing to do with greenhouse gas emissions, such as rapid population growth along coasts and in areas with limited water supplies," which exacerbates the impact of droughts.

Nevertheless, they observe that many activists regard adaptation as being necessary only because we aren't sufficiently aggressive in preventing greenhouse gas emissions, and that because "most projected impacts of anthropogenic climate change are marginal increases on already huge losses," applying adaptation only to that narrow margin makes no sense.

They cite the Philippines, where policymakers are wringing their hands about a possible gradual climate change-mediated rise in sea level of from 1 to 3 millimeters per year, while they ignore the primary cause of enhanced flood risk, "excessive groundwater extraction, which is lowering the land surface by several centimeters to more than a decimeter per year." (100 millimeters equals 1 decimeter, or about 4 inches.)

In a similar vein, they observe that "non-climate factors are by far the most important drivers of increased risk to tropical disease," although such risk "is repeatedly invoked by climate-mitigation advocates as a key reason to curb emissions." They cite a study that found that without factoring in the effects of climate change, "the global population at risk from malaria would increase by 100 percent by 2080, whereas the effect of climate change would increase the risk of malaria by at most 7 percent."

Pielke and his colleagues criticize "the political obsession with the idea that climate risks can be reduced by cutting emissions," because it "distracts attention" from other, more cost-effective approaches. (They might have added that it's also neither cost-effective nor logical.) However, for many activists, emissions reduction has become an article of faith in the church of radical environmentalism: Al Gore dismissed adaptation as "a kind of laziness, an arrogant faith in our ability to react in time to save our skins."

Such doctrinaire activism is inimical to resilience; it jeopardizes our survival as individuals and our success as a society. The need for resilience in both the private and public sectors is not new. The buggy-whip manufacturers had to adapt and begin supplying automobile components to Henry Ford's assembly line, or die.

But resilience is in short supply these days, and there is plenty of blame to go around. Politicians tend to be short-term thinkers, their purview often limited to the next election, and many of them seem to care less about the public interest than about scoring political points. Moreover, many of them are just not very smart, and they're particularly challenged in science and logic.

If we are to meet economic, environmental and public health challenges, we need plenty of options and opportunities for innovation -- and the wealth to pursue them. In society, as in biology, survival demands adaptation. But in large and small ways, unimaginative, short-sighted politicians and venal activists have conspired to limit our options, constrain economic growth and make real solutions elusive.

Henry I. Miller, a physician and molecular biologist, is a fellow at the Hoover Institution. His most recent book is "The Frankenfood Myth."

Opinion, Washington Post, March 11, 2007
Some Other Inconvenient Truths
By Warren Brown

LAUSANNE, Switzerland Dear members of the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee:

You and the media are primed for the big show opening on Capitol Hill next week -- a parade of top automotive industry executives coming before your committee to testify about what they are and aren't doing, what they can and can't do, and to hear what you want them to do to improve automotive fuel economy and help reduce tailpipe emissions that contribute to global warming.

There will be G. Richard Wagoner Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of General Motors; William Clay Ford Jr., executive chairman of Ford; Jim Press, president of Toyota's North American operations;

Tom LaSorda, chief executive officer of the Chrysler Group of DaimlerChrysler; and, for good measure, Ron Gettelfinger, president of the beleaguered United Auto Workers union.

There will be a number of environmentalists and "public interest" Washington lobbyists on hand. If not speaking before your committee, they will saturate the audience, or crowd the lobby outside of your hearing room handing out news releases, spinning the meaning of whatever is being said or left unsaid in testimony.

Members of your committee and lobbyists for and against increased fuel economy already are pumping the media, getting them ready for what the Detroit News has described as a slap-fest in which the "Big 3 face heat in D.C. over global warming," as if Detroit car companies alone caused global warming, as if Toyota, Honda or other foreign automobile manufacturers had absolutely nothing to do with it, as if Congress had nothing to do with it, but, mostly, as if American consumers were complete innocents in the matter.

There will be grandstanding aplenty, performances worthy of another Academy Award such as the one Hollywood gave former vice president Al Gore for his seminal, monumental, earth-shaking documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth." Gore himself will be on Capitol Hill spreading the gospel about improving the stewardship of our earthly resources.

It all will be great and noble fun. But here's betting that it will be meaningless, and here's why: As I've said in this space many times, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans, neither the environmentalists who champion increased fuel economy nor the few industrial recalcitrants who continue to oppose it, not Al Gore or any of his Hollywood cronies, not liberals or conservatives are willing to demand that American consumers do anything or pay anything extra to bring about decreased dependence on oil and all of the attendant environmental and national security benefits that could follow.

In a word, honorable salons, absent any call for consumers to play a real and perhaps painful part in curbing America's insatiable appetite for oil and helping to reduce global warming, your upcoming hearings will yield baloney.

I am writing to you from a country where the price of unleaded regular gasoline last week was $5 a gallon -- and 27 to nearly 40 cents a gallon higher in some cities. In neighboring France, Italy, Germany, Austria, prices for regular unleaded were running as high as $7 a gallon. Those prices did not stem from oil company gouging. They were the result of public policy -- high taxes on gasoline to curb consumption.

Guess what, your honors? It works. Fuel-efficient cars and trucks are plentiful here because they make economic common sense to the consumers who buy them. Mandatory stickers on new vehicles that show global warming-causing carbon emissions in terms of grams per kilometer make sense to consumers here, because most of them accept that global warming is real. (It's been an especially warm winter in Switzerland. Many ski resort operators are feeling pinched.) European consumers tend to be careful about buying vehicles with unnecessarily high horsepower. Why? Well, high taxes on gasoline for one. There also are taxes on things such as engine displacement. The bigger and more powerful your engine, the more you pay. So the little three-cylinder, 51 horsepower Chevrolet Matiz car I wrote about in today's On Wheels column makes lots of sense to many Europeans.

I could go on. For example, I could point out that you will pay less to park a small car in Rome than you'll pay to park a much larger vehicle. You'll pay extra to drive into central London during rush hours, because city officials believe that reducing congested, go-nowhere, engine-idling traffic reduces fuel consumption and air pollution. All of those actions stem from public policies in which consumers have been asked to do as much as corporations to improve the environment.

It took guts to put those policies into place, the kind that have been missing on Capitol Hill. The absence of such courage has led to the blame-shifting game represented by America's version of Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) in which corporations are asked to do everything to solve the problem and consumers are excused from contributing to the solution.

That approach has inspired the kind of silliness reflected in the recently reported, widely quoted comments of Dan Becker, director of the Sierra Club's global warming program, who likens the forthcoming appearances of automotive executives before you to those famed congressional hearings featuring America's once powerful, now chastised and humbled tobacco companies.

Said Becker of the automobile manufacturers: "Do they blame the victim? Or do they say: 'Okay, we'll do our fair share' [to improve fuel economy and reduce global warming]?"

Or, asked Becker, do the automakers resist the expected congressional entreaties and demands to improve fuel economy "and become the pariah the tobacco industry became?"

My response to Becker and to you is this: All victims are not inherently virtuous by virtue of their supposed victimization, especially if they have contributed mightily to their circumstance. And American consumers, drunk on cheap gasoline, faithful to the catechism that bigger is always better, wedded to the misguided notion that more is never enough, have contributed mightily to our looming energy and environmental crises.

If your hearings do nothing to address that fault, if you simply play for the newspaper headlines and top billing on the evening news programs with condemnations of the Big Three, your hearings will be worthless.

N.Y. Times commentary, Friday, March 9, 2007:
Al Gore's Outsourcing Solution
By Gregg Easterbrook

LAST month, to the delight of many global-warming skeptics, it was revealed that Al Gore uses 20 times as much electricity and natural gas at his Tennessee house than the national average. Out of curiosity, I put the former vice president's power bills and ZIP code through the home-emissions calculator of TerraPass, a company that sells "carbon offsets" — the promise to reduce greenhouse gases by the same amount your behavior increases them.

TerraPass estimated that the power use of a house equivalent to Mr. Gore's causes 377,000 pounds of greenhouse gases annually. That is roughly the annual carbon emission of 20 Hummers. Next time you see Mr. Gore wagging his finger about the energy sins of others, picture a caravan of 20 Hummers driving to the Academy Awards.

A Gore spokeswoman told the press that the former vice president pays extra for wind energy, and buys carbon offsets. He's not the only one: companies that sell such offsets are rising in popularity, and certificates for them were included in the stars' Oscar night goodie bags. Soon not just individuals, but the entire United States, may be purchasing carbon offsets on a grand scale.

TerraPass charges $1,247.50 for one year of carbon offsets for a home like Mr. Gore's, the price including a refrigerator magnet proclaiming the home "carbon balanced." Initially I found it hard to believe anyone could counteract Mr. Gore's prodigious energy lust for just $1,247.50, since planting about 20,000 trees would be required to neutralize even half his house's carbon footprint.

But it turns out that TerraPass does its good works in part by covering landfills to prevent methane from seeping out. Since methane is a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, covering landfills is a cost-effective way to wrestle with global warming. I may be annoyed by Mr. Gore's hectoring, but I'm not going to accuse him of hypocrisy on this one.

This all seems a classic example of economies of scale. Individuals can't do anything about landfill methane. But a company like TerraPass can combine the resources of many to accomplish this task, allowing the person of good intent to use energy with no net contribution to the greenhouse effect. Whether companies marketing offsets really do reduce greenhouse gases is something for consumer reporters or the Federal Trade Commission to determine. Assuming the sellers do as promised, buying carbon offsets isn't an exercise in guilt. It's smart economics.

There is also a bigger issue here. That offsets are smart economics may be central to slowing carbon accumulation in the atmosphere. The scientific case for greenhouse-gas regulation now strong, and Congress may soon impose the first carbon dioxide limits on American producers. Current bills in the Senate — one sponsored by John McCain and Joe Lieberman, another by John Kerry and Olympia Snowe — would cut domestic greenhouse emissions to about the level of 1990.

On the plus side, these bills would create a significant profit incentive for greenhouse-gas reduction. Offering inventors and entrepreneurs a profit incentive should lead to an outpouring of anti-global-warming innovations.

But even if successful, the McCain-Lieberman or Kerry-Snowe bills would only slightly lower future atmospheric levels of greenhouse gases. That's because Chinese carbon emissions are skyrocketing.

Since 1990, according to the World Resources Institute, American greenhouse emissions rose 18 percent while Chinese emissions rose 77 percent. China may pass America as the No. 1 emitter of greenhouse gases as soon as 2010. If current trends hold, by 2050 emerging nations led by China and India will emit twice as much carbon as the United States and Western Europe combined.

China's emissions are soaring because the Chinese economy is nearly three times as "carbon intensive" as America's, burning far more fossil fuel per unit of gross domestic product. Chinese coal-fired power plants are notoriously inefficient, consuming twice as much coal per kilowatt produced as American generating stations. They also run without the elaborate anti-pollution “stack scrubbers” found in Western power plants. And China opens a new coal-fired generating station every week to 10 days.

Here’s where offset economics come into play. Dollar for dollar, capital invested in greenhouse gas reduction would accomplish more if used to improve the efficiency of Chinese power plants than if spent in the United States. America needs legislation capping carbon emissions here, but Congress should allow American companies and consumers to use investments in carbon offsets in China and India against those caps, where the bang for the buck is much higher.

As a bonus, American investment in reducing Chinese and Indian air pollution would improve public health in those nations. Today smog in Chinese and Indian cities is worse than any in the West since London of the early 1950s. The result is far higher rates of respiratory disease in China and India than in the West.

If our goal in legislating against carbon releases is not simply punishing the West and its power companies but truly trying to reduce the accumulation of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, the main event will be in the developing world. We must use the smartest possible economics, and that means investing in China and India.

Gregg Easterbrook is a fellow of the Brookings Institution and the author of “TheProgress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse.”

Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, March 10, 2007:
Sign suggestion

Leaf or squiggle? What difference does it make?

Am I the only person on Planet Bakersfield who feels there are some important issues to be confronted?

We have the highest crime rate per capita and the worst air pollution in the nation and a person recently elected to the City Council who, apparently, doesn't have a moral compass. Well, maybe he'll fit right in.

Let's just put some signs up that say, "You are entering Bakersfield: be careful breathing; watch out for criminal activity; and be careful dealing with the City Council."

-- LANE RONNOW, Bakersfield