

EPA pressed on White House contacts over greenhouse gas waiver

By Erica Werner, Associated Press

in the Modesto Bee and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, April 10, 2008

WASHINGTON — A House committee chairman issued a subpoena Wednesday seeking records of contacts between the White House and Environmental Protection Agency officials concerning California's tailpipe emissions law.

Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., said he has found evidence that officials from the White House and the agency met before the EPA decided to block the state law. He did not disclose the evidence.

"Unfortunately, EPA has refused to disclose the substance and extent of its communications with the White House," Waxman said. The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee "must have these documents in order to understand how the agency's decision was made."

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shrader said the agency would review the subpoena and respond.

The agency's chief, Stephen L. Johnson, has said it was his decision alone in December to turn down California's request for a waiver that would have allowed the emissions law to take effect. Johnson has refused to tell lawmakers whether the White House sought to influence the decision. Democrats have alleged it was based on politics, not science.

At a recent Senate hearing, Johnson was confronted with records showing he had a "principals meeting" at the White House last May after a briefing on the waiver issue. Johnson said he could not remember what the meeting was about.

At least 16 other states were also blocked from putting in place the greenhouse gas emissions reductions sought by California when the EPA denied the waiver. Johnson said California had not made the case to get the waiver because global warming is not unique to the state and a new federal fuel efficiency law was a better way to go anyway.

California's law, which the auto industry opposed, would have forced automakers to cut emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by 30 percent in new cars and light trucks by 2016. The Bush administration has opposed any mandatory caps on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions.

Waxman last month accused the EPA of withholding hundreds of communications with the White House and Justice Department over the matter despite his requests. He has issued subpoenas for other documents from the EPA, including internal agency papers showing career employees recommended against denying the waiver. He had been negotiating for the White House papers until Wednesday.

EAST BAY DIGEST

Bay Area

By Denis Cuff

in the Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, April 10, 2008

Bay Area residents took less than four hours Monday to snap up all 666 rebates offered by an air pollution agency to replace wood-burning fireplaces with gas-burning stoves or fireplace inserts.

Applications to reserve the \$600 rebates opened at 8 a.m., and closed before noon when all \$400,000 of the clean air rebate money was spoken for.

"This shows a high level of interest in the public about investing in technology that makes the air cleaner," said Karen Schkolnick, a spokeswoman for the nine-county Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Gas appliances avert the fine particles in wood smoke, which can cause a variety of lung and heart problems, she said.

After submitting an application for a rebate, the consumer must install a gas stove or fireplace insert, a sealed system heating appliance that can cost more than \$2,500. The consumer must then submit proof of the installation in order to receive the money.

While the rebates go to a small percentage of the more than 1.2 million fireplace owners in the region, district officials say they hope the program will generate interest in others switching to gas burning appliances.

Building 'green' is getting cheaper, convention in Sacramento shows

By Jim Downing

Modesto Bee, Thursday, April 10, 2008

For Jim Ogden, finding "green" materials for state building projects used to mean custom orders for sustainably harvested wood and costly chemical-emissions tests on ceiling tiles.

But as green-building standards have matured and government mandates have taken hold, building green now means little extra hassle and, often, no extra cost.

"It's gotten a lot easier," said Ogden, a former California Department of General Services project manager turned green-building consultant. "The manufacturing sector has really stepped up to the plate."

This week, suppliers of green building supplies – everything from recycled carpet to waterless urinals – have filled the Sacramento Convention Center for the second Green California Summit and Exposition. The event, which ends today, is meant to help the public sector – local and state government, as well as schools – connect with commercial providers of green building materials and services.

Organizers said the convention is more than twice as large as last year, with more than 5,000 attendees.

While some vendors in the green-carpeted exhibition hall reported being hurt by the drop in residential housing construction, nearly all reported that business overall is good and getting better.

"The government has been a huge draw," said Guy Collignon, who owns Enviro-Crete in Rio Linda.

Collignon installs so-called "pervious" concrete, which allows water to seep through into the soil below, reducing the amount of runoff the local sewer system needs to handle. In his display Tuesday, water poured from a faucet onto a slab of concrete and then dribbled out the bottom.

Pervious concrete costs the same as the ordinary concrete he sells, Collignon said, and using it for sidewalks and parking lots can save money on certain permit fees and earn credits recognized by green-building certifiers.

A building's "greenness" is judged by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, standards, released in 2000 by the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council. The LEED standards encompass a wide range of factors, from energy and water efficiency to sourcing of recycled and locally produced materials to the use of carpet, paint and ceiling tiles that don't emit potentially harmful gases.

More than 1,300 buildings worldwide have been constructed or retrofitted to LEED-certified standards since 2000. Green building is expected to explode in the next few years. McGraw-Hill Construction Analytics estimates the value of green building construction starts will grow from \$12 billion in 2008 to \$60 billions in 2010.

Many at this week's conference said government mandates have been key to jump-starting the green building industry, because they forced builders and materials manufacturers to overcome the types of problems that Ogden recalled from his experience with the state Department of General Services.

Ogden worked on one of the greenest state buildings of all, the Department of Education building at 15th and N streets, which meets the very highest LEED "platinum" standard.

By 2015, all state buildings, new and old, must meet the somewhat lower, but still stringent, LEED "silver" standards. That's a part of California's plans to meet an executive order issued by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2004 that state buildings, excluding universities, reduce their energy consumption 20 percent by 2015.

Given today's ready availability of green building materials and expertise, constructing new buildings that are 20 percent or more energy efficient than their conventional counterparts will be straightforward, said Roy McBrayer, program manager of the state's Green Building Initiative.

"The real challenge – for everybody – is the existing built infrastructure," McBrayer said.

That's good news for Ogden, an expert in what's known as "recommissioning" existing buildings. This process takes a careful look at all the ways that a building uses energy, water and chemicals and determines how operational changes can make the building greener. Simple adjustments like reprogramming thermostats or changing the lighting can yield big savings, he said.

So far, McBrayer said, the state has found that recommissioning cuts energy use by more than 8 percent.

Second vote needed on Acequia bike lanes

Proposal needs amendment to Visalia general plan

By Gerald Carroll

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, April 10, 2008

Planned bicycle lanes for Acequia Avenue will require a second Visalia City Council vote before becoming reality, City Manager Steve Salomon said Wednesday.

One-way Acequia will be converted into a two-way street later this year. The council on March 3 approved a plan that would add bike lanes at the expense of 35 of the street's 113 on-street parallel-parking spaces.

But the city will be exposed to litigation if the council fails to hold a second vote amending the city's general plan, Salomon said.

"These are important procedural questions," he said.

Bicycle-lane proponents said they expect the project to be built on schedule and anticipate no legal challenges. The Visalia Chamber of Commerce and Kaweah Delta Medical Center - the main opponents of the bike-lanes proposal - have no plans to take legal action, officials said.

"This is the first time I've heard about [litigation]," said Nancy Lockwood, chairwoman of the chamber's board of directors.

In closed session Monday night, Visalia City Council members and city staff, including Salomon, discussed the possible legal repercussions of the council's bike-lane approval. The city's general plan does not include bicycle lanes on the busy east-west street.

The council approved the bike-lane proposal on the recommendation of the Bicycle, Pedestrian and Waterway Trails Committee.

Approval came by a 4-1 vote, with Councilman Don Landers dissenting.

On Feb. 13, Kaweah Delta CEO Lindsay Mann issued a statement opposing Acequia bike lanes. The hospital needs street parking, he said.

"Parking in the downtown area, and particularly at Kaweah Delta, is famously difficult," Mann wrote.

However, last year a 700-space parking structure opened next to the hospital on Acequia.

The parking facility is less than half full most business days.

Bike-lane proponents say the lanes would actually cut the need for parking. [They also would reduce pollution](#) and bolster, not reduce, downtown commerce, supporters argue.

Public generally supportive

Bicyclist Dale Simmons of Visalia told the council Monday that bicycles are considered vehicles under the state's vehicle code.

"Bikes belong on roads, not sidewalks," Simmons said. "Every person riding a bicycle on a highway has all the rights that drivers of vehicles have."

Simmons spoke out in support of the bike lanes during the public-comment period.

No one spoke up in opposition.

The public is generally supportive of the bike lanes, Salomon's office reported Wednesday.

Of 16 e-mailed responses received by the city, officials said, 10 were in favor.

The future of Acequia

Acequia now runs eastbound only. City engineers have completed early phases of design work on the bike-lanes option approved by the council.

Once construction bids are solicited, Salomon said, the council must vote once again for approval - giving opponents of the bike-lanes idea a final opportunity to persuade the council to reverse its position.

Bids are expected to be awarded this summer.

Spring fire program begins in Yosemite

Special to The Madera Tribune Thursday, April 10, 2008

Yosemite National Park Service started a prescribed fire in the Wawona area of Yosemite National on Wednesday.

The burn is expected to continue for two weeks, weather and air conditions permitting. The 2,000-acre monitored burn area is composed of grass, brush, Ponderosa pine and other mixed conifers.

Park officials say prescribed fire helps thin forests and reduce the build up of unnatural fuel loads, made up of dead or downed trees and dry foliage. In addition, the fire helps create a mosaic of diverse habitats for plants and animals, helping to recycle nutrients and aiding in the sprouting and re-growth of plants, shrubs and trees.

Controlled fires will help ensure defensible space for the community of Wawona, said park officials. Fire managers will use the area burned in last fall's Jack Fire, areas that were recently thinned, and previously burned areas as natural barriers. These recent treatments will increase the margin of safety for firefighters by reducing fire intensity along the current project's boundary.

This fire is the first of several prescribed burns planned to take place in the park before fire season. Other projects are planned for areas around El Portal, Foresta, and the Hodgdon Meadow area.

SoCal farmers face pesticide cuts in smog-cutting effort

AP State

In the Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, April 10, 2008

Farmers in Ventura County will be permitted to use less than one-third the amount of fumigant they told state authorities they need.

Some growers said the Department of Pesticide Regulation's notice this week setting tight limits on pesticide use during the smog-heavy months of May through October will make it hard for them to turn a profit.

Tomato farmer Scott Deardorff says some growers may produce fewer fruits and vegetables because of the caps. But berry grower Bill Reiman says farmers will find a way to work within the limits.

Fumigant use in Ventura County is being cut in order to comply with the federal Clean Air Act.

The county produces about a quarter of the nation's strawberries.

CDC foresees health risks because of climate change

H. Josef Hebert, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Thursday, April 10, 2008

Washington -- A top government health official said Wednesday that climate change is expected to have a significant impact on health in the next few decades, with certain regions of the country - and the elderly and children - most vulnerable to increased problems.

Howard Frumkin, a senior official of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, gave a detailed summary on the likely health consequences of global warming at a congressional hearing. But he refrained from giving an opinion on whether carbon dioxide, a leading greenhouse gas, should be regulated as a danger to public health.

"The CDC doesn't have a position on ... EPA's regulatory decisions," said Frumkin, determined to avoid getting embroiled in the contentious issue over whether the Environmental Protection Agency should regulate CO₂ under the federal Clean Air Act.

A year ago, the Supreme Court declared CO₂ a pollutant under the federal air quality law and told the EPA it must determine whether its link to climate change endangers public health or welfare. If it does, it must be regulated, the court decreed.

The EPA has been slow to respond, saying it must review such a regulation's broad impact on emissions from everything from cars and power plants to schools.

"To the science, there is strong evidence that carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas ... and there is strong evidence that climate change affects public health in many ways," Frumkin, carefully gauging his words, said when pressed by Rep. Hilda Solis, D-Monterey Park (Los Angeles County), on the issue.

Frumkin, director of the CDC's National Center for Environmental Health, outlined the range of "major anticipated health" issues as a result of climate change.

Among them, the prospects of more heat waves that are of special danger to the elderly and the poor; more incidents of extreme weather posing a danger of drought in some areas and flooding in others; increase of food-borne and waterborne infectious diseases; more air pollution because of higher temperatures; and the migration into new areas of vector-borne and zoonotic diseases such as Lyme disease, West Nile virus, malaria or dengue fever as seasonal patterns change.

"Over the next few decades in the United States, climate change is likely to have a significant impact on health," Frumkin told the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming.

The CDC is considered the government's premier disease tracking and monitoring agency.

Frumkin's testimony focused in greater detail and more directly on the likely human health risk of global warming than testimony given last October by the agency's director, Julie Gerberding, before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

It was later learned that the White House had heavily edited Gerberding's prepared testimony, deleting whole sections, including one titled, "Climate Change is a Public Concern."

"CDC considers climate change a serious public health concern," Frumkin told the House committee.

Frumkin said he recognized that the issue of global warming and public health "remains controversial, and some of my testimony may not necessarily reflect broad consensus across the administration."

Solis, who chaired the hearing, said she suspected that "a layer of screening" continues to limit what CDC officials are allowed to say, particularly regarding the agency's ability to deal with the health risks.

Ford vows to reduce auto emissions 30%

By Justin Hyde, Detroit Free Press
in the Modesto Bee, Thursday, April 10, 2008

IWASHINGTON — Ford Motor Co. pledged Wednesday to reduce the global-warming gas emissions of its U.S. and European vehicles by 30 percent between now and 2020, a move that, while driven by regulations, won praise from shareholder activists.

A coalition of groups, including the Connecticut state treasurer, has been pressuring U.S. corporations to lay out detailed plans for cutting emissions linked to global warming. The groups said Wednesday that Ford's response was a first among U.S. corporations, and would be used as an example for other firms, including General Motors Corp.

The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, which led the charge, said it would press a resolution at GM's shareholder meeting to make a similar pledge, and that 54 similar resolutions had been filed with public companies this year.

The goal closely mirrors the reductions required under new U.S. fuel economy rules, which target a 40 percent increase in standards to 35 mpg by 2020. Ford and other automakers' car fleets have long surpassed the standards for passenger cars.

Ford has a checkered past with environmental targets. It won plaudits in 2000 for pledging to improve the fuel economy of its SUVs by 25 percent in five years, but had to back down from that goal in 2003.

It also promised in 2005 to build 250,000 hybrid vehicles a year by the end of the decade, but surrendered that target less than a year later.

Sue Cischke, Ford's group vice president for sustainability, environment and safety engineering, said that Ford had fallen short in previous goals, but said the new target was the result of more detailed modeling.

"We started this" modeling "three years ago, and that's given us confidence to be able to say what our thinking and blueprint and plan is, and how it's aligning with the regulations," she said.

[Reedley Exponent commentary, Wed., April 9, 2008:](#)

Solar energy offers identity for valley's future

By Juan Arambula

The San Joaquin Valley's proud agricultural heritage is the product of decades of hard work, constant ingenuity, and a world-class bed of topsoil. These days, a new kind of Valley farm product is drawing on the same spirit of innovation, requiring us to look to the sky above instead of the soil below. The solar industry is a red-hot engine of economic growth in our state. Analysis by researchers at the University of California indicates that 20 manufacturing and 13 installation and maintenance jobs are created per megawatt (MW) of solar power installed. With some 150 MW set to be installed statewide in 2008, the solar energy industry is creating approximately 5,000 new jobs in California this year. These are relatively steady, good-paying jobs that, in many cases, require a high level of technical skill.

The Valley - and agriculture in particular - should be an important beneficiary of the new solar wave. After all, agricultural areas like ours are where the sun shines brightest. We have undeveloped farmland that could be perfect for solar production. And on the Westside, we have 100,000 acres of fallowed land that can no longer be used to raise food and fiber. Our region has much to offer the solar industry.

In addition, the solar industry has much to offer the Valley. We need good jobs, and research shows that solar creates up to ten times more jobs per megawatt than other conventional sources of electricity. We also have an immense air quality challenge that requires us to consider every possible way to avoid burning fuel and creating new pollution.

Yet while the Valley is a natural hotbed of solar power, our farms are not yet participating fully in the new solar economy. Data provided to my office by PG&E indicate that the utility's agricultural customers pay approximately 8.1 percent of the state funds used to provide solar incentives. However, these agricultural customers account for only 2.4 percent of the solar capacity installed in PG&E's service area. In other words, the cost of solar to our farmers has been outweighing the benefits by a factor of more than 3 to 1!

Last year, I introduced Assembly Bill 1223 to fix one problem in state law that may be contributing to this imbalance. Under existing law, a farmer would have to install a solar panel at each pump in order to fully qualify for solar incentives. AB 1223 changes this by giving farmers credit for solar energy generated at a single facility against the energy consumed at locations throughout their farm. The bill allows farmers to pursue commonsense economies of scale when installing solar generation facilities.

Meanwhile, I have directed my staff to continue looking for ways to assist in deploying solar

throughout our Valley, and we welcome your ideas as well. Much as the area near San Jose developed a multi-billion-dollar economy through its new identity as "Silicon Valley," I believe the San Joaquin Valley is poised to become the "Sunshine Capital" of our nation and reap the rewards from the research, manufacture and deployment of solar technology. This opportunity transcends economics, offering our Valley a proud and exciting regional identity in the 21st century and beyond.

Our Valley will always be proud of its farm heritage, but today there's a new crop in town. Welcome to Sunshine Capital USA.

(Juan Arambula represents the 31st assembly district. He has chaired the Assembly Jobs, Economic Development and Economy Committees, and also chairs Assembly Budget Subcommittee 4, which oversees state administration. In addition, he serves as a member of committees that oversee the state budget, higher education, revenue and taxation, the 10th University of California campus at Merced, and state procurement.)

[Modesto Bee editorial, Thursday, April 10, 2008:](#)

Short Takes: Cardoza will watch over California's ag priorities

It's about time. Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, was named to the House of Representatives Conference Committee to hammer out the details of the 2007 (that's right, 2007) farm bill with his counterparts from the Senate. Both chambers passed similar bills last year, but the bills have been sitting around in Congress waiting for the time to be right for legislators to work out compromises on a few important issues. Past farm bills have always been the province of Midwestern and Southern politicians; not this one. California is the nation's most important ag state and Cardoza has become one of our most important representatives in this realm. He championed the inclusion of money to study crop diseases, put more fresh food in school lunches and help promote U.S. food products abroad. He also will insist that more be done to help farmers do more to lessen their impacts on air and water through the Environmental Quality Improvement Program. With him on the Conference Committee, there is less of a chance that these important programs will be compromised out of the final legislation. Once the conferees reconcile the two pieces of legislation, it will go back to the full Senate and House for votes, then be sent to President Bush for his signature. Cardoza's comment? "Finally."