

Summer will not go quietly

Season was rather cool, but here comes the heat

By Alex Breitler, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Monday, September 21, 2009

Stockton has enjoyed its mildest summer in a decade.

Now get ready for a sizzling start to fall.

By the time the new season begins on Tuesday, the region will come close to triple-digit temperatures - not unheard of for late September, but a sign that this relatively balmy summer may yet have some kick.

The city has seen 15 100-degree days this summer, the fewest in at least several years. The scorchers that we did see quickly gave way to cooler weather, the lone exception a seven-day string of triple-digit days in mid-July.

High temperatures in July and August sometimes dipped as low as the 80s or upper 70s, 10 or 15 degrees below normal.

Air quality improved from last year. Farmers, so far, have had a good harvest. Master gardener Lee Miller enjoyed 40 heirloom tomatoes which might otherwise have wilted at his property east of Stockton.

"Plants don't like it real hot, either - just like humans," Miller said.

Plants and humans, brace yourselves.

The National Weather Service is calling for highs in the upper 90s at least through Thursday.

"The general feeling is it's been an average to slightly below-average summer," said forecaster Tom Dang. "But it's looking like we'll see a more and more certain extended period well above normal temps."

Such is our fickle weather.

Stockton's average high temperatures from June through August were the coolest in a decade. It goes without saying they were cooler than 2006, thanks to the ridiculous heat wave that made July of that year the hottest month on record dating back more than half a century.

The 1990s, however, saw seven summers that were cooler than what we've just experienced, according to data from the Western Regional Climate Center in Reno.

Going back even further, one of the hottest summers on record in Stockton was 1960, when the average high temperature was 96 degrees in June, 99 degrees in July and 95 degrees in August. And yet, the 1950s appear to have been blissfully cool - much more so even than 2009.

Stockton's relief this year was also felt across most of the country, where average temperatures were down 1 degree from 2008.

But one year does not a trend make, said Lydia Fox, chair of the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of the Pacific. Many factors control whether it's hot or cold, and you can't discount climate change based on one cool summer.

"We have to look at it over time," she said. "In 1991, after the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in The Philippines, there was noticeable global cooling and then it warmed up again... overall the trend is increasing."

Dang said the jet stream poked a little farther south this year, keeping things bearable.

Whatever the reason, a mild 2009 may have contributed to less ozone pollution buildup in the San Joaquin Valley, said Shawn Ferreria, a senior air quality specialist with the Valley Air Pollution Control District. That, and there have been fewer wildfires to blow smoke into our geographic bowl.

He warned, however, that air quality could deteriorate this week.

Bruce Blodgett, head of the San Joaquin Farm Bureau Federation, said it's been a good harvest for area farmers, but that there's a long way to go before the season is over.

"It's a tough enough business, let alone to have to deal with Mother Nature," he said.

Charbroiling air rule takes effect

By Alex Breitler, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Sunday, September 20, 2009

FRESNO - Valley air cops last week approved a rawboned rule forcing some restaurants to reduce the pollution caused by charbroiling burgers, steaks or seafood.

An original, tougher proposal was trimmed back after restaurant owners pleaded that they couldn't afford expensive new devices to capture the microscopic specks of grease that escape into the atmosphere while meat sizzles on the grill.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said Thursday's action was evidence that they listen to those affected by their many rules and regulations.

But, they added, charbroiling causes a serious health risk that will need to be addressed in the future when technology becomes more affordable.

"What we're seeing is that the public exposure to these kinds of emissions is similar to fireplace smoke," said Scott Nester, the district's director of planning. "It occurs right in the places where people live and that's a real big concern for us.

"We do think we need to pursue these emissions reductions," he added. "We've got to do it sensibly and with better information."

The district already had a rule on the books for restaurants using chain-driven charbroilers - most commonly, fast-food establishments.

The changes passed Thursday will regulate more of these types of businesses, but also takes the heat off of restaurants that use so-called underfired charbroilers - such as steakhouses or sea food eateries.

Officials said they learned the cost of the filters needed to control those emissions could be \$104,000 per restaurant, far more than previously expected. Jobs could be lost and prices could go up, they feared, while restaurants struggle for business in a slow economy.

Instead of requiring the filters, the district will offer an incentive program and revisit the rule in 2011.

Laura Fultz Stout of the environmental group Coalition for Clean Air said she was disappointed with the changes although she understood the economic hardship.

"To take out over 90 percent of the rule is disheartening," she told the district board.

A representative with the California Restaurant Association said Thursday the organization was withdrawing its opposition to the rule.

Overall, the nearly 2,500 commercial charbroilers in the Valley sizzle up more than 75,000 tons of meat each year, spewing more than 900 tons of pollution. The Valley's calm air conditions often limit the movement of these particles, meaning people living near restaurants may be more susceptible to respiratory problems.

Residential charbroilers or barbecues are not restricted by Thursday's approved rule.

Mayor named to board

Stockton Mayor Ann Johnston has been appointed to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board. She joins San Joaquin County Supervisor Leroy Ornellas on the 15-member panel.

Johnston's appointment — along with three other representatives from the cities of Hanford, Visalia and Taft — was the result of legislation to give urban cities a voice on the board, which was previously made up mostly of county supervisors. Two medical experts have also been appointed.

This week at the Capitol

Sacramento Bee, Monday, September 21, 2009

TODAY: Call it ZEV 2.0: The California Air Resources Board starts a two-day symposium on zero-emission vehicles at 9 a.m. with an introduction from Chairwoman Mary Nichols, followed by updates on fuel cell technology from Honda, Hyundai, Daimler and Toyota. This afternoon, UC Davis researchers will lay out greenhouse gas scenarios — for the year 2050. Tuesday's session looks at plug-in hybrids, battery electric vehicles and marketing. The symposium is being held at the Cal-EPA Building's Byron Sher Auditorium, 1001 I St., Sacramento.

UN climate chief says China poised to lead

By John Heilprin, The Associated Press

In the Hanford Sentinel, Monday, Sept. 21, 2009

The U.N. climate chief says China is poised to join the European Union in claiming "front-runner" status among nations battling climate change.

Yvo de Boer told The Associated Press that China is leaping ahead of the United States with domestic plans for more energy efficiency, renewable sources of power, cuts in vehicle pollution and closures of dirty plants.

Chinese President Hu Jintao will announce new plans to fight global warming at a U.N. summit on climate change on Tuesday.

De Boer said he also was encouraged by Japan's new goal of a 25 percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. The EU has promised to cut its emissions by 20 percent by 2020, but will cut up to 30 percent if other rich countries follow suit.

Obama to shift focus to climate change

The president faces serious challenges on global warming as the Copenhagen summit looms. He will speak to the United Nations and at a G-20 conference this week.

By Jim Tankersley, staff writer

L.A. Times, Monday, Sept. 21, 2009

Reporting from Washington - After months of almost single-minded focus on healthcare, President Obama is about to shift the White House spotlight to global warming -- first with a speech to the United Nations in New York on Tuesday, then later in the week at the G-20 economic conference in Pittsburgh.

The renewed emphasis on climate change and reducing carbon dioxide emissions comes at a crucial time: Negotiators are entering the home stretch in a drive to unveil a comprehensive international agreement to curb rising temperatures at a December conference in Copenhagen.

With key divisions remaining among the major industrialized nations, as well as with developing industrial powers and poorer nations, there is concern that negotiations leading up to Copenhagen could be bogging down. Obama administration officials, while admitting the seriousness of the challenges, hold out hope for a deal.

Here are nine hurdles facing Obama and his counterparts:

Healthcare: If the U.S. hopes to lead the way to a climate deal, leaders at home and abroad agree, it must complete congressional action on legislation that shows it's serious about reducing its own greenhouse gas emissions, which scientists blame for global warming. The House passed climate legislation in June, but the issue is stalled in the Senate while Congress debates the healthcare overhaul.

If the Senate fails to pass a climate bill before Copenhagen, "it would open the United States to the charge that it does not take its international commitments seriously, and that these commitments will always take second place to domestic politics," Ambassador John Bruton, head of the European Commission Delegation to the United States, warned last week.

Cost: For any climate bill to pass, key moderate Democrats and crossover Republicans will need to be convinced it won't lead to higher energy prices.

Republicans cite estimates that emission limits could cost a typical family thousands of dollars a year in higher energy costs and lost economic opportunity. Democrats cite other studies, including a Congressional Budget Office report last week that estimates the "average per-household loss in purchasing power would be \$90 in 2012 and \$925 in 2050," an average of about \$455 a year from 2012 to 2050.

Farmers, coal and oil: The House bill passed only after some representatives won financial breaks for coal-fired power plants, oil refineries, agriculture and other industries. Those interests hold potentially greater sway among key moderate Democrats -- and possibly some Republicans.

Even more such concessions are likely to be demanded in the Senate, potentially chipping away at the legislation's environmental goals.

The president's role: Obama stayed largely out of the House climate debate until its final days before passage. At a time when he's juggling one major domestic initiative, several small ones and a complete foreign policy overhaul, he'll need to focus on the climate bill to get it through by December.

"It's going to take the president's leadership" to pass a Senate bill, said Dan Lashof, who directs the Climate Center at the Natural Resources Defense Council, which is aggressively fighting for the bill. "I think he's prepared to do that."

Obama pragmatism: The U.S. negotiating team is determined to broker only an international deal that could win ratification in the Senate -- a position that means the team is sticking to far less ambitious emission reduction targets than many other nations would like. Success in Copenhagen could hinge on Obama's ability to sell the more limited agenda.

China and India: Getting the world's fast-developing mega-emitters on board will be crucial to any hopes of curbing global warming. With India deeply reluctant to accept emission limits, U.S. officials have pinned their hopes on winning Chinese support.

Money: The multibillion-dollar sticking point of the talks could be who pays the bill -- both to help developing nations curb their emissions and help poor island nations adapt to an already changing climate. Global finance ministers will take up the question at the Group of 20 summit this week.

Poorer nations have asked the developed world to contribute 1% of its annual gross domestic product to the effort, a potentially \$140-billion-a-year tally in the U.S. alone -- and one that doesn't sit well with Republicans in Congress.

Deforestation: Nations can shut down coal plants and pull cars off the road, but the easiest way to slow the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere may be to stop deforestation. The

issue will be key to the talks, particularly when it comes to providing incentives for Brazil and Indonesia to cut down fewer trees.

The term paper problem: Veteran climate negotiators say every treaty session ends with a flurry of last-minute activity that generally results in an agreement. It's like college students pulling all-nighters to turn in their final papers.

But with so much unresolved so close to the opening of the session, experts say negotiators need to speed up -- and not cram at the end -- if they have any hopes of success.

Uruguay says pulp mill is not polluting river

By Mike Corder, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Monday, September 21, 2009

THE HAGUE, Netherlands—Uruguay denied Argentina's claims at the United Nations' highest court that a pulp mill on a river separating the two countries is polluting the air and water, saying Monday it meets environmental protection standards.

Argentina argued last week at the World Court that Uruguay breached a 1975 treaty by authorizing construction of the mill on the River Uruguay without consulting its neighbor.

It wants the court to order Uruguay to pay unspecified compensation.

Uruguay lawyer Prof. Alan Boyle said that the Finnish-built Botnia mill—Uruguay's largest ever foreign investment project—has "caused no harmful pollution to the river."

He said the \$1.2 billion mill meets strict World Bank standards as well as those applicable to pulp mills built in Europe.

"It has not put at risk the ecology or the ecosystem of the river," Boyle told judges, citing an independent report prepared for the World Bank's International Finance Corp.

Last week lawyers for Argentina said the mill is already pumping pollution into the water and air leading to a toxic algal bloom in February and sending foul smelling gases drifting over nearby towns.

The dispute has soured friendly relations between the South American neighbors and led to long-standing blockades on key bridges over the river by Argentine protesters. Uruguay argues that the blockades have cost it hundreds of millions of dollars in lost trade.

"This is a sad episode in the historically close relations between Argentina and Uruguay," lamented Uruguay's delegation leader Carlos Gianelli.

"The situation is compounded by the excessive language that Argentina used throughout last week's presentations in with it portrayed Uruguay as nothing short of an international outlaw," Gianelli added.

Argentina's chief representative in the case, Susana Ruiz Cerutti, last week called the Botnia plant, which turns eucalyptus trees into raw material for paper, "a bad mill in a bad place."

Boyle on Monday turned her comment on its head.

"It is the right mill in the right place on a river more than capable of sustaining this type of economic development," he said.

The court will likely take months to issue a ruling. It earlier refused to order a halt to construction of the mills and turned down a Uruguayan request to order Argentina to end the bridge blockades.

Its decision in this case will boil down to whether or not Uruguay breached the 1975 treaty on the river's management by authorizing the construction of pulp mills.

World court rulings are final and binding, though they are not always obeyed. The court, which is the highest judicial body of the United Nations, adjudicates disputes between nations.

SFO offers carbon offset kiosks for green flyers

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Sunday, September 20, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO -- Passengers flying from San Francisco International Airport have a new way to potentially undo the environmental damage caused by their flights.

Three kiosks recently unveiled at the airport allow flyers to pay a voluntary fee to counteract their plane's carbon emissions.

Travelers enter their flight's details to find out how many pounds of carbon dioxide they are responsible for offsetting. The machines then charge \$13.50 per ton.

A round-trip from SFO to John F. Kennedy Airport in New York would cost \$23.42 per person. A one-way trip to Los Angeles International Airport would cost \$1.75.

Of the \$13.50, \$12 funds reforestation at a 24,000-acre forest preserve in Mendocino County. The remaining \$1.50 supports San Francisco environmental programs.

A Day for Rethinking Our Four-Wheeled Fixation

Car-Free Event Explores Alternatives

By Ashley Halsey III, Staff Writer

Washington Post, Sunday, September 20, 2009

By the time noon rolls around today, more than 8 million people will have driven from some place to some place else in the Washington region. By midnight, that number will double to 16.3 million.

What if they hadn't? Tuesday, after all, is World Car Free Day.

Forget for a minute that jobs would be lost, classrooms would be empty, that the president and the polar bears at the zoo would go hungry. Dream of a day when not a single ignition key turned.

By the end of that day:

The air would be free of 60,000 tons of CO₂ and 238 tons of other chemical byproducts created when a spark meets gasoline.

Seven million gallons of gasoline would have been preserved at a savings of about \$18.5 million.

Several hundred people would have avoided those close encounters of the worst kind, the 244 daily traffic crashes.

One hundred twenty-two people wouldn't end the day injured.

And at least one person (statistically, 1.19 persons) wouldn't have died in a car crash.

World Car Free Day is the annual apex of a global movement that promotes alternatives to a car-dependent society, including improvement of mass transit, cycling and walking, and the development of communities where jobs are closer to home and where shopping is within walking distance.

In an area that ranks in the top five in every survey of urban congestion, of commuter stress and of time wasted going bumper to bumper, the notion of a day without cars sounds as delightful as it does preposterous.

In this region, the group is asking people to pledge to leave the car at home -- a step taken by 5,445 people on Car Free Day last year. Car Free Day Metro D.C. organizers are keeping an online tally of those taking the vow this year. They hope this number will top 10,000.

"People are given a chance to consider how their city might look and operate with a lot fewer cars," said Nick Ramfos, director of Commuter Connections, a regional transportation network

coordinated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. "It produces many benefits in air quality, reducing stress and alleviating congestion."

For those who embrace the notion of the day but can't get to work without a car, Ramfos promotes a "car light" day through use of park-and-ride mass-transit options and carpooling. His organization provides a year-round service matching people who want to carpool rather than ride alone.

On Car Free Day, F Street NW will be closed between Seventh and Ninth streets from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m., and Commuter Connections and other organizations will provide information and demonstrations about alternatives for getting around.

Stewart Schwartz, executive director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, sees an upside in the downside of the day that would unfold if no one drove a car here.

"We'd quickly show that we don't have enough mass transit," Schwartz said. "You'd find that bicycling would be an option, along with telecommuting. Those who would be more successful in their daily chores would be those who live in walkable communities."

A 24-hour break from burning carbon fuel might mean a peaceful hiatus from noise and a reduction in air pollution, but there's no guarantee of a Code Green air-quality day. When the Washington region has a bad-air day, it's caused by an atmospheric inversion that stalls soot blown our way from the Midwest.

"If everybody turned off their cars, we still could have a Code Red day because of that pollution coming in from the smokestacks in the Ohio Valley," said Lon Anderson, spokesman for AAA Mid-Atlantic. "There is a major misconception about how much vehicles contribute to pollution."

Anderson said about 25 percent of the region's pollution comes from cars.

"What comes out of the tailpipe is about 95 percent cleaner than it was 25 years ago," he said. "A lawn mower that runs for a couple of hours puts more pollution in the air than a car driving from here to New York and back."

Anderson said a true car-free day would be "very frustrating for those of us in this region."

"Our mass transit, if anyone has noticed, is at capacity at the rush hours," he said. "It's fun to dream, but every now and then your feet have to come down and touch the concrete."

California plans to levy greenhouse gas fees

By Kelly Zito, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, Sept. 20, 2009

More than a year after Bay Area air pollution regulators became the first in the nation to charge businesses for pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the program has raked in close to \$1.7 million. And as early as this week, the state may follow suit by imposing similar fees on large California polluters as part of an ongoing effort to cut greenhouse gases 20 percent by 2020.

The proposed program from the California Air Resources Board and the fledgling regional effort are designed to use the fees to pay for measuring, monitoring and studying the emissions blamed for global climate change.

While health and environmental advocates say tracking greenhouse gases is an important step in the state's plan to battle climate change, big emitters say there is a risk of creating an unfair hodgepodge of regulations and fees.

"We continue to have a lot of problems with (the program)," said Dennis Bolt, manager of the regional office for the Western States Petroleum Association, which represents many of the Bay

Area's largest oil refineries. "If every district, county, city in the nation does this ... when you roll that up, it's pretty punitive."

Last year the Bay Area Air Quality Management District voted to charge about 2,500 businesses for emitting greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide. The fee, which currently amounts to 4.5 cents per metric ton of greenhouse gases, is widely seen as too small in most cases to deter the discharge of carbon dioxide and other gases. Instead, the fees were set to generate money for further study.

The largest emitters - refineries, power plants and cement factories, for example - must pay hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Other businesses - including auto shops, coffee roasters and restaurants - pay \$1 or \$2 per year.

A bigger role

The district already regulates smog-forming volatile organic compounds and nitrous oxide, as well as particulates that come from wood-burning fireplaces, diesel generators and construction equipment.

Though the majority of the Bay Area's air emissions come from cars and trucks, the local air district does not have the authority to regulate those sources.

Yet in expanding their purview to include greenhouse gas emissions from stationary sources, such as smokestacks at major refineries, the 16-member district leap-frogged state and federal regulators.

"The air district sees itself as being in a leadership position on air pollution areas," said Brian Bateman, director of engineering at the Bay Area air district.

The state, however, is finally closing the gap.

This week, the California Air Resources Board is expected to approve a new rule that would levy a fee of 12 cents per metric ton of carbon dioxide on the state's largest polluters beginning in late 2010 or early 2011, according to agency spokesman Stanley Young. The fee would decrease to 9 cents per ton over three years.

Like the Bay Area measure, the state fee would cover the administrative costs of implementing the greenhouse gas-reduction goals detailed in AB32. The 2006 law requires California to cut its overall greenhouse gas emissions by about 174 million metric tons over the next decade, bringing the state's emissions to 1990 levels.

For a company such as Chevron, whose Richmond refinery is the largest in the Bay Area, the local district fees come to about \$200,000 per year - about 9 percent of the total fees paid to the air district each year.

If the California fee goes into effect as planned, the refinery would have to pay more than \$700,000 total to both state and local regulators.

Broader goal

While the companies say the two sets of fees create a duplicative, patchwork effect, environmental and health advocates say the programs are a necessary interim step toward creating a more comprehensive statewide system that puts a price on carbon. That could mean an outright carbon tax or a cap-and-trade system that would set an emissions limit and require companies to buy credits to pollute above that level.

Eventually, argues Shankar Prasad, a fellow with the Coalition for Clean Air and former deputy secretary of science at the California Environmental Protection Agency, the cost of carbon will be built into just about everything producers and consumers create and use.

"The end goal is that we have to reduce carbon and that means we have to put a price on it," he said. "It's not a question of one business or industry or person paying for it. There's a societal cost. All of these costs will eventually be passed on."

County cites better air, suspends clean fuel rule

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Modesto Bee and other papers, Saturday, September 19, 2009

LAS VEGAS -- Clark County commissioners have voted to suspend a rule requiring the use of cleaner burning gasoline in the winter in the Las Vegas area.

County air quality chief Dennis Ransel says a regulation adopted in 1999 to reduce carbon monoxide emissions isn't needed anymore because fuels today have less sulphur and produce less carbon monoxide than in the past.

Air quality in Clark County failed to meet federal Environmental Protection Agency standards for more than a decade when the rule was adopted.

Ransel notes the EPA determined in 2005 that the valley's carbon monoxide levels met federal standards.

Officials say they expect approval to end the fuel rule from the EPA as part of a larger air quality plan submitted for approval in the next 18 months.

Smoky skies prompt call for new wildfire strategy

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, September 19, 2009

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—Another smoky summer in Fairbanks has some people asking the state to veer from its "let it burn" approach to most wildfires.

The current fire protection plan gives areas across Alaska one of four fire-protection designations. The vast majority is given "limited" protection status, which means virtually no response.

State officials say there's not enough money to return to the pre-1980 days when crews responded to virtually every blaze.

The state, however, could give more areas near Fairbanks a higher priority in the state's fire management plan, said Chris Maisch, state forester with the Alaska Division of Forestry. Maisch said the state might also consider a "smoke response plan" when air quality in the Interior becomes hazardous.

Maisch spoke Thursday at a public meeting at the Alaska Division of Forestry warehouse, where officials and roughly 40 members of the public gathered to discuss the 2009 fire season. Rep. Scott Kawasaki, D-Fairbanks, said he called the meeting after receiving numerous complaints about the "let it burn" status most fires are given.

Almost 3 million acres burned in Alaska this summer, continuing a trend of fiery summers.

The hands-off approach is generally a sensible one, said Tom Irwin, the Commissioner for the Department of Natural Resources. Fires are a natural part of a changing ecosystem, and the state doesn't have the money or manpower to fight every blaze.

"The fact is, Alaska is going to burn no matter what resources we throw at it," Irwin said.

But that answer didn't satisfy residents such as Niesje Steinkruger. Lives and personal property are taken into account when prioritizing fires, but she and others at the meeting said the effect of thick smoke shouldn't be given short shrift.

She said a critical fire classification "seems to mean if my skin is burning, not if my lungs are burning."

Maisch said the fire plan might be shifted to adapt to those concerns.

"The plan is meant to be a living document—not something we just did once and never modified," Maisch said.

Power plant gets initial thumbs down

By Eric Firpo/ TP staff

Tracy Press, Tuesday, September 15, 2009

A subcommittee has recommended the state's energy commission reject a request by Pacific Gas and Electric Co. that would have give the company more time to build a power plant just west of San Joaquin County.

If the energy commission at its Sept. 23 meeting also rejects the request, it likely kills a project that activist and Tracy shoe store owner Bob Sarvey argued would have given nearly all the financial benefits to Alameda County, while sticking Tracy and San Joaquin County with virtually all of the air pollution.

Sarvey, energy commission staff and a consumer group called The Utility Reform Network all opposed the extension.

PG&E on Sept. 23 will try to convince the energy commission to extend the deadline, said PG&E spokesman Blair Jones.

PG&E agreed to buy the Tesla Power Project in July 2008 from Midway Power LLC, a subsidiary of Florida Power and Light that had applied in 2001 to build a 1,120-megawatt plant just across the Alameda County border west of Tracy and Mountain House. PG&E wanted to shrink it to a 560-megawatt power plant. (One megawatt can power 750 homes.)

In April of this year, PG&E asked for a five-year extension of the construction deadline, which was scheduled to end in July before the commission gave the company until Tuesday to argue for an extension.

But the commission decided against PG&E's request for several reasons, one of which was that the smaller power plant proposed by the company was not what the commission agreed to back in 2004.

The commission also noted that the public utility failed to diligently begin to build the plant once it bought the rights to it, and it waited until April 2009 to ask for an extension though it knew in 2008 that the deadline loomed.

In its ruling, the subcommittee noted Sarvey's contention that, on the one hand, PG&E wanted to extend the deadline to build the plant, yet on the other hand, it asked permission to have customers pay \$4.9 million in "abandoned project costs."

Sarvey speculated that PG&E might try to pass onto ratepayers the expense of buying the rights to the plant in the first place.

"If PG&E makes a bad business decision, the shareholders should pay for that, not the ratepayers," he said.

[Tracy Press Guest Commentary, Friday, September 18, 2009](#)

His Voice: New building a bound forward in efficiency

By Leroy Ornellas

San Joaquin County recently had a ribbon cutting for its new administration building in downtown Stockton. The public's response to the new building has been overwhelmingly positive, but lingering questions and concerns may persist. I'll try to address some of these issues.

It should be noted that plans and discussions for a new county administration building began in June 2000, long before the current economic crisis. Information gathered was used to develop the county's Downtown Stockton Facilities Master Plan, which was accepted by the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors in 2003.

The county has several departments scattered (somewhat inefficiently) throughout the city of Stockton. A well thought-out Facilities Master Plan will rein in some of those inefficiencies when the plan is fully implemented.

Several downtown Stockton locations were considered for the administration building. I advocated that a new county civic center should be built on county-owned property at the airport near the county Agriculture Center. My position lost traction once the city stepped forward and offered the current site for \$1 in May 2007.

It should be noted that Stockton is the county seat, and any thought of moving the new building away from the county seat could be problematic.

The county shares the current building with the court system, and the state court plans to build a new 12-story courthouse on the west side adjacent to the current site. Court construction is slated to begin in 2014. Once completed, the old courthouse will be torn down.

Some have wondered why even build a new administration building? Why not save that money and stay where we are? Again, the growth of the county demanded a plan to accommodate a growing workforce and to consolidate the current workforce for efficiency.

Planned relocation of departments to the new building will reduce expenditures for leased space, providing a cost avoidance of \$800,000 annually and offering opportunities to utilize vacated county-owned facilities for other needs.

In 2005, the county implemented a Capital Facilities Fee on new construction to help mitigate the impact of development in the county. Moving forward, funds from the CFF, administrative support charges on federal and state programs and the lease payment savings will go toward paying down the long-term, tax-exempt certificates of participation used to finance the new administration building.

Because the financing of the building was incorporated into the refinancing of the existing jail, the combined annual debt payment will remain the same for the life of the loan. With an accelerated payment schedule, we expect the new building to be paid off in fiscal year 2036-37.

I should add that the county has an excellent credit rating and received a favorable interest rate.

The administration building also includes state-of-the-art electronic capabilities, including an energy-efficient design for heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems.

In the end, the residents and taxpayers of San Joaquin County own a state-of-the-art building that is the envy of many counties and cities, a building that has become a must-see destination. I urge you to pay a visit.

Call my office at 468-0181. I would enjoy showing it to you.

Leroy Ornellas of Tracy represents the 5th District on the county Board of Supervisors and is the current board chairman.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, Sept. 20, 2009:](#)

'Tsunami of demands'

Regarding Bryan Sanchez's Sept. 12 response to Dr. John G. Telles' Valley Voices commentary on health care reform [Sept. 12]: With all due respect, mere access to affordable health insurance coverage won't fix the economic or societal burdens of poor health.

There is a "tsunami" of demands upon our health systems. Our younger generations are actually unhealthier than their parents, partly due to the poor health habits we cultivate in our modern society.

Health insurance access and the costs of health care do need change. It's important to work toward that goal. Dr. Telles' point is that reasonable and equal access to doctors and medicines are not enough to improve the public health or our current health care problems. Health reform must include simple steps at the local level: clean air, clean water, safe neighborhoods and equal access to local market resources.

Focusing on just insurance or access reform blunts the opportunity to make a difference. Public responsibility appears to be missing from the debates or concept of public health.

To continue important conversations about this complex issue, consider visiting the Public Health Institute, Partnership for Prevention or [Dialogue4Health.org](#). An ounce of public health prevention really does yield the pound of public health cure.

Jodi McEdward, Madera

[Dr. Telles' commentary of Sept. 5, 2009, in the Fresno Bee:](#)

Reform may not improve our health

By John G. Telles

Over this summer, health care reform has been hotly debated in both Washington and in town hall meetings.

This discourse has emphatically pointed out that our health care delivery system is the most expensive in the world, consuming 16% of our gross domestic product while other modern health care systems in Europe and Japan consume only 8% to 9% of their GDPs.

It has been even more emphatically pointed out by critics of our current system that, despite its enormous cost of \$2.5 trillion, we lag behind 20 other countries in health care statistics such as infant mortality and longevity.

Some policy makers interpret these bad outcomes as a failure of our health care system to deliver value for the dollar spent. Certainly the nation's health will improve if more people have access to health care by expanding the health insurance coverage.

However, it is naive to conclude that all of our poor health outcomes will improve to the level of those other countries by simply expanding health insurance coverage.

Unfortunately policymakers have paid too little attention to the fact that incentives to make personal healthy choices and urban design have a very strong influence on the health of a population.

Many studies published in medical journals over the past decade have demonstrated that doing a simple, cost-free thing like walking 30 minutes a day will reduce a person's risk for having a heart

attack by more than 30%. It would take billions of dollars of statin drugs to accomplish a similar outcome.

Recently, a series of studies published in the Journal of Preventative Medicine demonstrated that U.S. cities with compact-mixed land-use designs that connect areas where people live, work, learn and play with sidewalks and bike trails have populations that are more physically active, have less obesity, diabetes and hypertension than in urban-sprawl type developments that are designed around the automobile. These studies have also demonstrated that the density of fast-food restaurants in neighborhoods is directly correlated to the incidence of obesity.

A recent scientific statement from the American Heart Association pointed out that over the past 30 years total daily American calorie intake has increased by an average of 150 to 300 calories per day, and approximately 50% of this increase comes from liquid calories, primarily as sugar-sweetened beverages.

Currently the average teenager is consuming 30 teaspoons of added sugar per day. Aggressive marketing to children by some components of the food industry has contributed to over consumption of calories in the form of sodas and fast food.

Many parents and schools have not taught healthy eating habits. These forces have resulted in unhealthy diets and have contributed to the fact that now almost 1 of 3 teenagers in America is obese.

If you travel to Europe, you immediately notice that their urban design encourages pedestrian and bicycle transit without any loss of the quality of life. At this time there is also a paucity of fast-food restaurants, and their grocery stores are not packed full of sugar added snack foods and sodas.

Furthermore, many countries in Europe have strong culinary traditions that have not yet been disrupted by the fast-food industry. A simple reason Europe can spend less on health care and get better results is because the European population to begin with is healthier than ours.

As our policymakers debate the cost of a new national health care plan, they need to understand that to control these costs it will be necessary to develop policies that redesign our urban environment and to create better incentives for our population to make healthy choices. The health consequences of the obesity epidemic in our children will translate into huge medical costs to treat diabetes, strokes, heart attacks, renal failure and degenerative joint diseases.

Unless policymakers act to design programs that will promote healthy lifestyle choices, we as a nation will see for the first time that the next generation will be less healthy and will not live as long as the current generation no matter how much money we throw at health care.

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[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, Sept. 18, 2009:](#)

Clean industry is better

Mr. Matthew Marquez [letter "Applauds Rep. Nunes," Sept. 13] is an environmentalist and a socialist! He flushes his waste into a government-provided sewage system (socialism) and rids his neighborhood of the bacteria that killed men less than a century ago (environmentalist!) It took scientists studying sick people to connect the effluent running through neighborhoods with the death of citizens.

He also (probably) lives in a neighborhood free of industry due to building codes (socialism) and is free of trash thrown out the door by his neighbors (both!) because scientists have studied

neighborhoods and convinced governments to regulate where industry is built and how trash is removed.

Oil and gas refineries fought pollution controls until they found out that scrubbing the waste from their stacks produced waste heat and chemicals that they could sell as co-generated electricity and chemicals.

Cleaner industry is better for everyone. The farmers of Delmarva learned that chicken waste was killing crabs that other people made a living catching. Was it wrong to ask farmers to capture the waste to save another's livelihood?

For Devin Nunes to call me a communist for caring about my environment is akin to me calling you a murderer because a conservative nut kills an abortion doctor!

Donald Dutton, Clovis