

Students can submit calendar artwork

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, Oct. 8, 2009

The deadline to submit artwork for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's 2010 kids calendar is Monday.

Valley kindergarten through high school students are encouraged to enter the contest with their artwork based on making the air cleaner and promoting a healthier lifestyle.

Artwork ideas include walking to school rather than driving, not burning wood, using propane grills instead of charcoal and avoiding drive-through restaurants.

Artwork should be done with a landscape orientation and can be submitted in both English and Spanish.

About 20,000 calendars will be distributed all over the Valley in December.

Artists must include their name, address, phone number, age, grade and school and send it in a flat envelope to 2010 Kids Calendar, Valley Air District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726.

Ceres council candidates hope for status quo until economy picks up

By Ken Carlson

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, October 8, 2009

CERES — Political candidates rarely pronounce that they want to maintain the status quo.

But, in a bad economy, maintaining the same level of city services is often deemed an accomplishment, and it's what the candidates are talking about in the Ceres City Council race.

"Police and fire service is important to maintain because the crime element seems to go up in a tough economy," said Ken Lane, a councilman seeking a second four-year term.

Also vying for the two council seats are incumbent [Chris Vierra](#) and challenger Michael Kline.

The Ceres council made severe cuts this year to balance the 2009-10 budget, eliminating the jobs of department heads and midmanagement employees while preserving police officers and firefighters.

Council members will make more tough decisions to reduce spending by an estimated 15 percent to 20 percent in the fiscal year that starts July 1.

Lane, first elected in 2005, said some budget cuts this year targeted departments where the workload has fallen off, such as city planning. He said employee unions will need to cooperate to balance the budget next year.

Lane said he is seeking re-election because of unfinished business. The city needs to push forward with water system improvements and an arrangement with Modesto for treating wastewater, he said.

"Some of our waste-water is sent to Turlock (for treatment) and we are tied to whatever rates they set," Lane said. "The state wants us to regionalize sewer service, and we have two councils (in Ceres and Modesto) that are willing to look at that."

Vierra was appointed to the council in 2003 and elected for the first time in 2005. He said the budget will continue to be a challenge because of the state taking revenue from cities and the decline in property taxes.

"We are looking at all options," he said. "We have to look at the way we provide city services and see if there are ways to improve efficiencies."

Vierra said the city has accomplished a great deal in the past six years. For example, it opened a long-planned community center in June. Traffic flow in Ceres should improve with the Whitmore Avenue-Highway 99 overpass project, he said.

The city needs to complete a revitalization plan for downtown, he said, so projects are ready to go when the economy picks up.

"The community center is a strength for the downtown," Vierra said. "We need to rezone certain areas to create business opportunities, to help locate things like movie theaters and promote a walkable, livable downtown."

[Vierra is one of five city representatives serving on the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board and is the board's current chairman.](#)

As a civil engineer, Vierra said, he understands the city's infrastructure needs.

Kline fell 150 votes short of winning a council seat in 2007. He is running on a platform of curbing unnecessary spending. The city spends too much money on consultants, he said.

"Right now, they are spending money on a consultant to come out and let people know that water meters are coming to their neighborhoods," he said, noting the information already was provided in newspapers and city water bills.

Kline, who serves on the Planning Commission, said he wants to get more people involved in city government. On average, two or three members of the public attend council meetings, he said. To keep the public informed, upcoming council agenda items could be included in utility bills, he suggested.

Kline said the downtown needs to be revitalized, but the city needs to get more support from merchants. He also vowed to bring an independent voice to city government.

"I am a new, fresh voice," he said. "I have my opinion and I am not afraid to share it. I care deeply about the city of Ceres."

Waiting for Wal-Mart study

All three candidates said they are waiting for environmental studies before deciding whether to support a 195,000-square-foot Wal-Mart Supercenter, which would anchor a retail center at Mitchell and Service roads.

Vierra and Lane want to see an analysis of how the giant outlet would affect local businesses. The project could go before city planners and the council early next year.

"I definitely want to see what impacts it would have on the grocery industry," Vierra said. "There are many unanswered questions."

Lane remarked: "I don't know if I will vote for or against it. It depends on what impact it will have."

Kline is concerned about traffic congestion at key intersections on Mitchell Road. "The busiest intersection in Ceres is Hatch and Mitchell roads," he said. "You should look at the traffic on Mitchell during busy times when the canneries are running."

Ceres City Council

CANDIDATE: Michael Kline

AGE: 51

CAREER: Account manager, Tony's Fine Foods

EDUCATION: Ceres High School

FAMILY: Married, three children

PRIORITY: Public safety

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CANDIDATE: Ken Lane

AGE: 49

CAREER: Mo-Cal Office Solutions, outside sales

EDUCATION: Ceres High School

FAMILY: Married, three children

PRIORITY: Public safety

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CANDIDATE: Chris Vierra

AGE: 43

CAREER: Managing principal of Stantec Consulting, a development consulting service

EDUCATION: Associate degree, Modesto Junior College; bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

FAMILY: Married, two children

PRIORITY: Public safety

Meeting in Sanger on mining proposal

Bee staff

Fresno Bee, Thursday, October 8, 2009

The Fresno County Planning Commission will be making a decision that will affect county residents as well as visitors from all over the world. The decision is whether to grant a conditional use permit to CEMEX, a foreign owned company, to allow them to mine aggregate on Jesse Morrow Mountain and to build asphalt and cement plants at its base.

The mountain is 15 miles east of Fresno on the north side of Highway 180, an area designated as a scenic highway. It, and Mount Campbell across the highway, are gateway mountains to the national parks and familiar landmarks to Valley residents. It is also a mountain sacred to the local Choinumni Tribe.

Three CEMEX officials assured me that this project will not be visible. This is not true. Additionally, the lights will be visible for miles. These officials also assured me that the permit is a "done deal" and that operations will begin in 2007. The permit has not been issued nor approved by the Board of Supervisors. It is my hope that both entities will listen to

Fresno County officials will hold an information session tonight at Sanger High School to discuss a draft environmental report on the proposed mining of Jesse Morrow Mountain. Cemex Construction Materials is planning to mine rock on the southern side of the mountain about eight miles east of Sanger.

The session will be in the high school's multipurpose room, 1045 Bethel Ave., in Sanger, from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

The company plans to use 824 acres for the project -- 400 acres for mining, 40 for processing facilities, and the rest for a land buffer, according to the county.

The draft environmental report lists a number of potential effects from the project, including noise and [diminished air quality](#).

The county will accept comments on the draft report through Dec. 1. The draft report can be found online at: www.co.fresno.ca.us/departmentspage.aspx?id=4322.

Modesto drops its blue bag program

By Leslie Albrecht

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, October 07, 2009

Modesto is trashing its blue bag recycling program. The City Council voted 7-0 Tuesday night to end the program Jan. 1.

City officials cited many reasons for tossing the 12-year-old program, which allows residents to collect recyclables in blue plastic shopping bags and put them out to be picked up with other trash.

The blue bags weren't collecting enough recyclables because many residents take glass bottles and aluminum cans to redemption centers to make extra cash, said Modesto Solid Waste Manager Jocelyn Reed.

The blue bags themselves aren't recyclable, so encouraging their use sends mixed messages about how to help the environment. And, the state cut funding for a \$30,000 grant that Modesto used to pay for the program.

The council vote comes as other California cities are tightening recycling laws. San Francisco starts a mandatory composting program later this month. The San Jose City Council recently voted to ban plastic and paper shopping bags.

But the end of blue bags won't mean the end of green-friendly activity. Modesto recently expanded the list of stuff that can go into green yard waste cans. Once just for grass clippings, the yard waste toters now accept paper, cardboard, food scraps and anything else that's biodegradable. The city turns the material into compost and sells it.

Resident Carrie Rasmussen told the council she'd like to see Modesto offer a third garbage can for all recyclables. "Having the dedicated recycling bin is something that people are used to having in other cities," Rasmussen said.

City officials are less than enthusiastic about the third-can option. In a report to the council, Reed said the third can would cost residents an additional \$3 to \$5 a month.

Adding another can also would require more trucks, which [could create more air pollution](#) and wear and tear on city streets.

Marsha Bradford, a former recycling coordinator for the city, said the blue bag program failed in part because it didn't create enough "peer pressure." With the blue bags hidden inside garbage cans, residents can't see how much their neighbors are recycling, Bradford said.

She told the audience that recycling is only one part of eco-friendly living. Reducing what people put into the waste stream is the first step, Bradford said.

"You can vote at the cash register and look at what materials and packaging am I bringing into my home in the first place?" Bradford said. "Are they recyclable?"

Fairbank voters reject sales tax proposal

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Thursday, October 8, 2009

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—Fairbanks voters have rejected a sales tax proposal and a related measure to reduce property taxes.

The plan could have increased spending on roads, police and fire protection by \$8 million.

Former Mayor Steve Thompson, who supported the sales tax, said critics used scare tactics. He said the results will mean putting off needed road repairs.

Tuesday's election also narrowed the field for Fairbanks North Star Borough Mayor to Luke Hopkins and Tammie Wilson. The borough assembly incumbents will have a runoff in November. Hopkins is a building maintenance superintendent and a director of the Alaska Gasline Port Authority. Wilson is a property manager.

Also, voters apparently want local control of clean air regulations, The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reports. They are approving an advisory measure that asks the mayor and borough to establish a pollution prevention program.

The borough is under state and federal pressure to reduce winter air pollution blamed on wood-burning stoves.

Hopkins and Wilson have taken different approaches to the issue. Hopkins said work should start now on pollution-prevention plans.

Wilson said the clean air advisory vote is evidence that people don't trust the government.

Feds, Texas officials to discuss air pollution

By John McFarland, The Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, San Diego Union-Tribune and other papers, Thursday, October 8, 2009

DALLAS — Federal regulators who ruled Texas' often-criticized oversight of industrial air pollution is out of line with federal law are taking the first step to change the state's air-permit rules.

The Environmental Protection Agency is meeting Thursday with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, environmentalist groups and business leaders for the first time since announcing Sept. 8 that it wants to scrap major portions of the state permit program because it doesn't comply with the Clean Air Act.

"We will continue to work with the state to resolve these issues, hopefully to the satisfaction of all stakeholders, to allow the state to continue to administer and enforce the Clean Air Act," EPA spokesman Dave Bary said.

States have some leeway in how to enforce the federal pollution law. The EPA has for years disagreed with how Texas has done that but took no action until last month. Texas is home to more oil refineries, chemical manufacturing plants and coal-fired power plants than any other state, and also leads the nation in greenhouse-gas emissions.

TCEQ's executive director Mark Vickery defends the permit rules, saying they've helped cut down on pollution.

"Now that the EPA has placed its cards on the table and we finally know what specific objections they have with our programs, we look forward to working with them to resolve outstanding issues," Vickery said in a statement. "We hope the EPA will consider the actual emission reductions achieved through our state programs and will continue to build on those successes."

Several environmental groups, who have long criticized Texas pollution rules as passive and friendly to big business, are descending on Austin from around the state and country with calls for a massive overhaul of TCEQ.

"The EPA needs to bring the Texas air pollution permitting program in line with federal law," Ilan Levin, an attorney with the Environmental Integrity Project, said in a statement. "That's going to take some time, and in the meantime EPA will need to exercise very strict oversight."

Environmental groups plan to ask the EPA to implement a system to penalize Texas if it doesn't enforce federally approved rules, scrutinize new state permits, halt construction on industrial plants with improper permits and recall older permits.

"As home to approximately 1,500 major sources of air pollution, Texas houses a large percentage of the country's air pollution sources," Kelly Haragan, director of the Environmental Law Clinic at the University of Texas School of Law, said in a statement. "If the federal Clean Air Act isn't working in Texas, the whole program is broken."

The EPA rejected some state permitting programs for a variety of problems, including monitoring, record-keeping, enforcement and public comment. The rulings will become final next year, following a 60-day comment period.

Natural gas to play bigger role at Chevron

The firm's future vice chairman says large investments will be needed by the industry, even in the recession, to take advantage of the fuel's potential.

By Nathan Olivarez-Giles

Los Angeles Times, Thursday, October 8, 2009

Natural gas will be an increasingly important product to Chevron Corp. and other energy companies, a top executive said Wednesday.

But George Kirkland, who will take over next year as the company's vice chairman, said it would take considerable investment -- even in the recession -- for firms to take advantage of natural gas' potential as a lower-emissions fuel.

"The fact is, natural gas has come of age," Kirkland said in a speech at the World Gas Conference in Buenos Aires. "What was once second prize to oil is now a premium commodity."

The International Energy Agency has said that natural gas constitutes 22% of the world's energy mix, and demand is growing. In his speech, Kirkland, who is currently Chevron's executive vice president of Global Upstream and Gas, said more than \$5.5 trillion in investment would be needed over the next 20 years to meet that demand.

Kirkland's speech was a bit of a rally call to the fuel industry, said Phil Weiss, senior equity analyst for Argus Research's energy division.

"This is the direction the company is going and he's trying to highlight some of the things that are coming," Weiss said of Kirkland's speech. "But for this to be realized the way the industry was planning before the recession, everyone has to stay on track, so to speak, and that is a challenge in this environment."

With the recession sending oil and other commodity prices dramatically lower, long-term investments in fuels have looked uncertain, Weiss said.

"Personally, long term, I like natural gas," Weiss said. "It's the lowest producer of emissions, as far as hydrocarbons, and if the investments aren't made now, these companies will miss out in the future."

Kirkland hailed natural gas, particularly in its liquefied form, as the bridge to a lower carbon future.

"Without continued investment, natural gas will simply not be available to meet demand and drive economic growth," he said.

He praised the [Gorgon Project](#), on Barrow Island in Australia, which will extract and distribute natural gas. He said it would have the capacity to power a city of more than 1 million people for 800 years.

Chevron owns half the project, and the other half is owned by Royal Dutch Shell and Exxon Mobil Corp. The project has created some [controversy](#) because the island is home to the threatened flatback turtle and 21 species of animals.

Kirkland said Chevron was betting big that the market for natural gas would grow immensely in the long term.

"I am confident that natural gas will redefine the world's energy equation in the 21st century," he said.

Shares of Chevron fell 5 cents Wednesday to \$70.51.

U.S. companies may look abroad to fight global warming

Firms could save billions by combating deforestation abroad instead of cleaning up their own emissions at home, report says.

By Margot Roosevelt

Los Angeles, Times, Thursday, October 8, 2009

U.S. companies could save tens of billions of dollars by investing in efforts to combat deforestation in developing nations instead of cleaning up their own domestic carbon dioxide emissions, according to a report released Wednesday.

The report, compiled by a high-powered bipartisan group, backs the use of "forest offsets" in the global effort to curb pollution that is heating up the atmosphere. It was released in advance of the upcoming Senate debate on climate legislation and an international meeting on the issue set for December in Copenhagen.

The burning of tropical forests and their conversion to cattle farms and soybean fields is responsible for about 17% of the emissions that are causing global warming -- more than all the world's cars, trucks, trains and planes combined -- scientists say.

"It is one of the few major sources of emissions that can be addressed cost-effectively now," said the report from the Commission on Climate and Tropical Forests, co-chaired by former Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-R.I.) and John Podesta, chief of staff under President Clinton and now head of the Center for American Progress, a Washington-based think tank.

The panel's researchers estimate that if American companies invest about \$60 billion between 2012 and 2020 to preserve rain forests in such countries as Brazil and Indonesia, they could achieve the same amount of global emissions cuts while avoiding the expense of about \$110 billion on remedies in the United States.

That net savings of \$50 billion might be enough to make climate legislation palatable to companies that have fiercely opposed tough global warming rules.

The 71-page report also calls on the U.S. government to make similar, multibillion-dollar investments to help developing nations survey their forests, measure their carbon, set up legal mechanisms to preserve them and enforce conservation.

But the massive use of offsets -- a way for companies to pay for emission reductions outside their own operations -- is controversial. Legislation pending before Congress would allocate money to preserve tropical forests by auctioning U.S. pollution permits, as well as by allowing corporate offsets under a carbon trading program.

Preventing deforestation is "an excellent way to mitigate the costs of other climate solutions," said Michael G. Morris, chief executive of American Electric Power and a member of the commission that produced the report. Ohio-based AEP, along with the Georgia-based Southern Co., burns more coal than any utility in the Western Hemisphere.

The Nature Conservancy, which has an extensive international forest program, was represented on the panel and endorsed its offset recommendations.

"Providing this opportunity can reduce the costs of legislation substantially," noted Eric Haxthausen, the organization's director of U.S. climate policy.

Many European environmental groups, however, along with Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and Rainforest Action Network, oppose offsets as "a way for corporations like American Electric Power to buy their way out of any pollution cuts, and avoid replacing coal with solar and wind power," said Rolf Skar, Greenpeace's senior forestry campaigner.

Tropical forest emissions should be included in a new international treaty to be considered in Copenhagen in December, the report says. With the United States leading "a global partnership," it adds, tropical deforestation could be halved within a decade and eliminated by 2030, an essential move if the climate is to be stabilized.

The 16-member commission includes former Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), former U.S. Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, former Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs Frank Loy and former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan.

Sullivan and another commissioner, former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Sherri Goodman, called deforestation a national security issue because climate change could lead to political instability. "Many forest-abundant nations are located in regions where fragile states, extremists and political unrest are a serious concern," Goodman said.

California moved ahead of the federal government last month, adopting complex rules for regulating and verifying forest carbon in the voluntary carbon market.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has launched cooperative agreements with Brazil and Indonesia and other forest-rich nations to provide technical expertise with a view toward opening the state's planned cap-and-trade market to tropical forest offset programs.

Fight Brewing Over Possible Rider to Weaken Air Pollution Regs for Ships

By Robin Bravender of Greenwire

In the NY Times Thurs., October 8, 2009

Clean air advocates are girding for a battle over a possible amendment to the annual U.S. EPA spending bill that would weaken the agency's ability to regulate air pollution from oceangoing vessels

Five advocacy groups yesterday urged the House and Senate overseers of the fiscal 2010 Interior-EPA appropriations bill to oppose any possible rider that would "weaken, delay or limit" EPA's ability to implement proposed engine and fuel standards for the largest ocean-bound ships.

It remains unclear what such an amendment would entail, but sources on and off Capitol Hill say that House Appropriations Chairman David Obey (D-Wis.) and House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman James Oberstar (D-Minn.) are backing the language. Spokesmen for the congressmen were not immediately available for comment.

"We're shocked that a Democratic Congress would even consider attacking the Obama EPA on such a critical public health issue," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch.

At issue is EPA's proposed strategy to address emissions from oceangoing vessels. The plan would slash U.S. nitrogen oxide emissions by 1.2 million tons and particulate matter emissions by about 143,000 tons by 2030. EPA says the program would prevent between 13,000 and 33,000 premature deaths per year by 2030.

"The need for these rules is urgent," states the letter from the American Lung Association, Clean Air Watch, the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency. "Any delay will postpone the health benefits."

Yesterday, EPA's Clean Air Act Advisory Committee -- a stakeholder advisory group -- approved a resolution recommending that EPA carry out its proposal and "decline requests for any geographic exemptions including, but not limited to, the Great Lakes."

The spending bill has cleared both chambers, but changes are possible when House and Senate conferees meet to hash it out. It is unclear exactly when that conference will occur.

Shipping industry representatives have argued that the rules would be particularly harmful to ships that operate exclusively in the Great Lakes and U.S.-Canadian waterways, and urged EPA to craft separate rules for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway. Several shipping groups urged EPA to extend the timeline so that shippers can conduct more thorough reviews, especially in light of the regulations' estimated price tag of more than \$1 billion.

'Forest offsets' by U.S. firms backed by report

Margot Roosevelt, Los Angeles Times

In the S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, October 8, 2009

U.S. companies could save tens of billions of dollars by investing in efforts to combat deforestation in developing nations instead of cleaning up their own domestic carbon dioxide emissions, according to a report released Wednesday.

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"It is one of the few major sources of emissions that can be addressed cost-effectively now," said the report from a panel co-chaired by former Sen. Lincoln Chafee, R-R.I., and John Podesta, chief of staff under then-President Bill Clinton and now head of the Center for American Progress, an influential Washington-based think tank.

The commission estimates that if American companies invest about \$60 billion between 2012 and 2020 to preserve rain forests in such countries as Brazil and Indonesia, they could achieve the same amount of global emissions cuts while avoiding the expense of about \$110 billion on U.S. remedies.

That would amount to a net savings of \$50 billion - enough, perhaps, to make climate legislation palatable to companies that have opposed tough global warming rules.

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Nissan's electric vehicle tilts into corners

By YURI KAGEYAMA - AP Business Writer

In the Fresno Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, October 7, 2009

ATSUGI, Japan -- Nissan's Land Glider electric vehicle tilts from side to side, sashaying into curves by up to a 17-degree angle, as though showing off in a fashion statement that it's zero-emissions.

The wheel segments of the car can move separately from the cabin, allowing the car, still an experimental concept model, to sway and swerve, almost like a motorcycle.

Nissan Motor Co. project design director Takashi Nakjima says Land Glider is designed to be a "personal city commuter."

In a demonstration for reporters, the car glided around on a test course at Nissan's design center, outside Tokyo, leaning slowly to one side, and then the other, as it turned tight corners.

Just 110 centimeters (43 inches) wide, Land Glider has sensors to calculate speed and level of lean required for corners, and can maneuver through narrow streets and fit into tight parking spaces, according to Yokohama-based Nissan.

People aboard sit in a line, one behind the other, not next to each other as in traditional two-seaters.

Reporters got a preview look of the "concept model" but no test drive, of the Land Glider. There are no immediate plans for commercial production.

It will have its world premiere at the Tokyo Motor Show, opening to media Oct. 21, two days before its formal opening. The show runs through Nov. 4 in the Tokyo suburb of Chiba.

Japanese rivals Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co. are also showing nifty electric vehicles at the show.

Toyota's FT-EV II has a roomy cube design, a relatively conventional look for electric cars. But Honda's EV-N is small and cute with an intentionally old-fashioned car shape.

"We feel exploratory efforts in electric vehicles have entered a new stage" with Land Glider, Nakajima said.

Japanese automakers say electric vehicles will largely be used initially for limited range, commuter travel.

Nissan is among the first to offer an electric vehicle, set to go on sale in Japan, the U.S. and Europe next year - the rather regular-looking Leaf.