

How do business owners think local government can help?

By Leslie Albrecht

Modesto Bee, Monday, Feb. 15, 2010

- **STREAMLINE REGULATIONS.** John Duarte, president of Duarte Nursery in Hughson, said the biggest hurdle facing ag businesses such as his is too much regulation. But that comes mostly from the state and federal level, not local government, Duarte said.

"I don't want an [air quality regulator](#), a water regulator, an OSHA regulator," Duarte said. "We don't need different bureaucracies throughout the state with their own fleets of Ford Tauruses and inspectors."

- **PROVIDE BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION.** Blake Steward, senior vice president of human resources at Pacific Southwest Container in the Beard Industrial District, said more bus lines would help his company hire more people.

"When there's good public transportation, it gives people who would otherwise not even apply for a job here the opportunity to consider us as a potential employer," Steward said. "There are people who don't have their own transportation, but they can still add a lot of value to a company and they are employable. But they have to be able to get to work. If they had access to public transportation, I know that would make it easier for some people."

- **PROVIDE LOANS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES.** Becky Shokraii, human resources manager at Dot Foods, says she'd like to see local governments provide loans to small businesses.

"If you look at some of our strip malls, there are vacancies," Shokraii said. "But if you think about times of economic downturn, it's a great time for people to take that growth and run with it, if they have the means to do that."

"If you think about Steve Jobs and the computer industry, that's when they started. It's not like they had money; they found somebody to take the pitch."

- **BUY LOCAL, NOT CORPORATE.** This idea applies more to consumers than governments. Mike Nelson, owner of Mike's Roadhouse bar and grill on Dale Road, said he worries most about competition from national chains.

"People always ask me why there aren't more Mike's Roadhouses. It's because of corporate America. You've got Chili's, you've got Chevys, Applebee's."

"I don't know what the city can do other than just come together as a city and promote within. Buy local. I really believe in that and I do that myself, but I don't think a lot of people really respect that."

- **NOTHING.** "I don't see anything that the city can do that would affect my business directly," said Steve Mort, chief executive officer for Don's Mobile Glass.

He said his company takes advantage of incentives offered in Stanislaus County's enterprise zone, where businesses get tax rebates when they hire people or buy new equipment.

"I don't have a magic bullet that says if (the city) did this, I could hire 10 people," Mort said, noting that state and county regulations seem more onerous than the city's rules. "I think the city is doing a pretty good job. My impression is that the City Council and the city management is doing a good job as far as making the city user-friendly."

Poor air quality halts wood burning in Tulare County today

Tulare Advance Register Tues., Feb. 16, 2010

Wood burning is prohibited today in Tulare County by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District because of deteriorating air quality.

The prohibition includes burning wood, wood pellets and artificial logs in fireplaces and heaters.

Exceptions apply to buildings with no natural gas service and homes where wood burning is the sole source of heat.

Air quality was expected to remain moderate today.

Study: Freeways will harden your arteries

By Alejandra Molina

O.C. Register, Monday, Feb. 15, 2010

A new study found that people who live near freeways are more likely to develop hardening of the arteries – which increases the chances of a heart attack and stroke -- than those who live farther away.

Researchers at the University of Southern California and UC Berkeley along with colleagues in Spain and Switzerland used ultrasound to measure the carotid artery wall thickness of 1,483 people who lived near freeways in the Los Angeles area – taking measurements every six months for approximately three years.

What they found was that the artery wall thickness among those living within 100 meters -- 328 feet -- of a highway increased by 5.5 micrometers per year, or more than twice the average progression.

"For the first time, we have shown that air pollution contributes to the early formation of heart disease, known as atherosclerosis..." said study co-author Michael Jerrett, UC Berkeley associate professor of environmental health sciences in a statement.

"The implications are that by controlling air pollution from traffic, we may see much larger benefits to public health than we thought previously," Jerrett added.

The 5 freeway, which cuts through the heart of Orange County, was built to carry 115,000 cars in the 1950's and now carries an average of 370,000 vehicles a day. The 57 freeway carries 300,000 and is projected to carry 360,000 by 2025.

In the Southern California area roughly 1.5 million people live close – within 300 meters -- of major freeways, according to new reports.

New leader looks to fire up Sierra Club

By Jeff Mitchell, Bee Correspondent

Sacramento Bee, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2010

ALAMEDA – You could say that Michael Brune graduated to the big time in environmental politics when he learned the magical powers of the pound sign (#) and the numerals 8 and 0.

When he punched those numbers into a telephone inside a Home Depot store in Atlanta in 1999, Brune suddenly found himself in full control of the building's intercom system.

From atop this electronic bully pulpit, Brune's voice rolled across the cavernous store, reminding shoppers that Home Depot was, at the time, buying wood products from companies harvesting trees from rare and endangered old-growth rain forests.

The stunt, subsequently repeated at hundreds of other Home Depot stores over the next several months by scores of Rainforest Action Network activists, forced the building supply chain to change its purchasing practices – thus preserving some 5 million acres of rain forest in British Columbia that otherwise would have been logged. Time magazine called the unique protest the year's most important environmental victory.

It also made the then 26-year-old Brune a modern environmental folk hero.

More than a decade later, the Alameda resident who has gained a national reputation for embarrassing, shaming, cajoling and generally annoying some of America's most high-powered corporate chieftains into doing the environmental "right thing," is about to become executive director of the Sierra Club, the nation's oldest and largest environmental organization.

"I'm very excited about this opportunity," Brune said in a recent interview. "It's a big honor for me to help lead an organization that I've always admired and appreciated."

Brune, 38, takes over the reins of the organization that famed conservationist John Muir started in 1892 at a time when the club, according to some observers, has lost some of the sting in the political punches it throws.

When Brune starts on March 15, he will replace veteran Executive Director Carl Pope, who will stay on in the new role of executive chairman.

But it is exactly Brune's civil but edgy activist style – combined with his impressive string of victories against corporate environmental wrongdoing while at the Rainforest Action Network – that Sierra Club leaders said they found most appealing.

"The board was particularly impressed by Michael's (proven) talent for bending the will of powerful adversaries without breaking the bonds of civility that keep them at the table," board President Allison Chin said.

Brune, married with two small children, says his arrival doesn't signal that a sea change is about to occur within the 1.4 million-member organization.

He noted that the club, along with its virtual army of Washington, D.C.-based lawyers and lobbyists, has a proud history of originating or heavily influencing most if not all of the nation's major environmental statutes.

Author of the well-received Sierra Club 1988 book, "Coming Clean – Breaking America's Addiction to Oil and Coal," Brune did say he plans to redouble the Sierra Club's efforts in the fight against global climate change. He said the club will push aggressively to get a clean-energy bill out of Congress before the end of 2010.

At the heart of that struggle, Brune says, lies America's continued dependence on coal-fired electricity plants – plants which currently provide an estimated 45 percent of the nation's energy but which are a major sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

Also at the top of Brune's first-year hit list is bringing an end to the coal industry's "mountaintop removal" mining practices.

Mountaintop removal, which occurs mostly in the Appalachian states, involves using an explosive charge to remove the top 300 or 400 feet of a mountain to expose a seam of coal for mining.

While federal regulations require mining companies to replace the top layer of dirt, the process destroys environmental habitat and releases toxins into the air that threaten the health of workers and local residents.

"We must replace dirty coal in this country," Brune said. "We must continue this fight until we convince our political and industry leaders that there are more economic benefits to be had by transitioning to wind power and other forms of clean energy."

Brune, who will be the club's sixth executive director in its history, says he would also like to see the club inspire a new generation, just as Muir did in the 1890s.

"We'll get to them any way that we can – through Facebook, Twitter – you name it and we'll try it," he said. "But we also have to get our kids and young people physically out there. If they don't ever see the beauty of this country's natural resources with their own eyes, they'll never really get why they need to be protected and defended."

Did D.C.'s blizzard bury climate change legislation?

The Washington Post, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2010

The Post asked political and environmental experts whether the record snowstorms buried climate change legislation this year. Below, responses from Christine Todd Whitman, Kenneth P. Green and Steven F. Hayward, David G. Hawkins, Douglas E. Schoen, Emily Figdor and Ed Rogers.

CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN

Environmental Protection Agency administrator from 2001 to 2003; governor of New Jersey from 1994 to 2001; chair of the Republican Leadership Council

It shouldn't, but it will. Among the reasons winter storms will make this issue more politically challenging are overreach and simplification -- on both sides of the debate. "An Inconvenient Truth" brought the issue

of climate change to the fore, but many of the charts implying that the world's end is near were overly dramatic.

Calling what is happening simply "global warming" is misleading. There will be many changes along the way, including periods of colder temperatures. Some of this semantic debate is important. Using the term "climate change" rather than "global warming" prevents people such as Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) from being able to claim that this is all a hoax.

It is also overreach to imply that humans are the sole cause of climate change. Our activities are exacerbating natural phenomena, making us part of the problem, but the Earth and its climate have been changing since its formation. Because of human activity, things are changing faster than nature or humans can adapt, and the sooner we take steps to slow the changes, the better off we will be.

Scientists have long predicted that one consequence of climate change will be more frequent and more severe storms. They can't predict where and when storms will occur, but their extreme magnitude reflects climate change. Yet let's not forget, even as we dig out from the blizzard, that 10 of the past 11 years were the warmest on record -- that should tell us something.

KENNETH P. GREEN AND STEVEN F. HAYWARD

Resident scholar and F.K. Weyerhaeuser fellow, respectively, at the American Enterprise Institute

The corpus of climate legislation was already cooling before Snowmageddon. The cold wind that buried its chances this year didn't come off the snow burying Washington: It came off horrific unemployment reports, lackluster economic growth, massive Tea Party rallies and vicious town hall meetings. After the breakdown in Copenhagen, the explosion of "Climategate" and the election of Scott Brown, the Democrats' rapid pivot to focus on jobs was inevitable.

There may be an energy bill, or a jobs bill with a lot of "green energy/green jobs" folderol, but that bill won't have a strong climate title. It shouldn't. Given how little influence the United States had on the Copenhagen negotiations, imagine how little we'll have at the next U.N. meeting if we've committed to greenhouse gas controls. Once we've bound ourselves, why would our economic competitors match our level of self-imposed economic bondage? People who think the Chinese are waiting on U.S. leadership are a few shovels short of a clean driveway: The Chinese are waiting for U.S. leadership on climate like they're waiting for U.S. leadership on freedom of speech, religion, assembly and property rights.

DAVID G. HAWKINS

Director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's climate programs

Just as a group of cancer-free, cigarette-smoking 75-year-olds does not disprove that smoking causes cancer, a handful of snowstorms does not counter the massive evidence that we are changing the Earth's climate. What is that evidence? We know the gases produced when we burn fossil fuels trap heat in the atmosphere; emissions of those gases have grown enormously in the past 100 years; the concentrations of those gases in the atmosphere have grown in lock step; global average temperatures have increased over the same period, and natural influences on temperature can explain only a small fraction of that increase. We also know that the resulting changes in climate have already had detectable impacts on ecosystems, droughts, precipitation patterns and other features important to human well-being. People who hype the snowstorms to oppose action on climate are charlatans.

Fortunately, a growing number of lawmakers understand there are solutions that will create jobs and enhance energy security while cutting the pollution that contributes to climate change. They are joined by business leaders, labor, veterans, religious groups and others who know that waiting to act would be a huge, costly mistake. Sens. John Kerry, Lindsey Graham, Joseph Lieberman, Maria Cantwell, Susan Collins and others are making serious efforts to develop a bill that can pass the Senate. Common sense will prevail, even here in Washington.

DOUGLAS E. SCHOEN

Democratic pollster and author

The recent bout of wintry weather and the overall political climate have almost certainly killed climate-change legislation this year.

The science that supports the causes and effects of global warming has become increasingly open to doubt and question. The weather this winter, particularly in the past week or so, makes it more difficult to argue that global warming is an imminent danger and suggests that global warming may well not be as inexorable a force as some believe.

Further, the political downside to supporting the legislation is unambiguous. Americans are primarily concerned with jobs and the economy. Any significant effort spent on other legislation will reignite charges, originally hurled during the lengthy and unsuccessful health-care debate, that the White House and Democrats in Congress are out of touch with voters' needs.

EMILY FIGDOR

Federal global warming program director of Environment America

The snowstorms that ground the nation's capital to a halt only underscored the need for bold action to fight global warming. Heavier, more frequent snowstorms are just what scientists predict in a warming world, as extreme weather events -- whether blizzards or heat waves -- become more common.

Yet the legislative environment is uncertain. Within weeks, the Senate is slated to vote on a measure that would block President Obama from enforcing the Clean Air Act to fight global warming. The vote is expected to be a nail-biter, thanks to a frenzied lobbying campaign by America's biggest polluters. Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska -- ironically, the state most directly, rapidly and dramatically affected by global warming -- plans to offer a resolution that would strike at the heart of the Clean Air Act, a law with a nearly 40-year track record of cutting dangerous pollution to protect Americans' health and the environment, and of spurring technological innovation. This vote is a true test of whether lawmakers will act to protect the public and allow America to compete economically in the coming decades or if Big Oil and Coal call the shots in the Senate. If the resolution passes, it will indeed bury real legislation on the issue this year.

ED ROGERS

White House staffer to Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush; chairman of BGR Group

There is global climate science and then there is the Global Warming Movement. The movement hijacked the science a long time ago, and it has had its share of setbacks lately. Its leaders have tried to stiff-arm their way past errors, lies, fraud, pointless tax increase proposals and some really peculiar posing in Copenhagen.

Now they have suffered a coup de grace: public ridicule brought on by a record-breaking blizzard blasting their East Coast home base. The movement was already dead in Congress for 2010 (its climate-change bill has been sidelined), but Snowmageddon buried it. How could it be that heat waves evidenced global warming, but so did a cold wave? The public isn't buying it anymore.

In November, the public will give a cold shoulder to a bunch of intellectually frozen hypocrites who demand economic sacrifice to solve a problem that voters don't see or feel. At least for a while, the left will have to think up a new way to dictate a lifestyle for the rest of us. Maybe now the science can continue without the clumsy overreaching of the movement's priestly class.

Proposal for fairgrounds yields plenty of criticism

Study analyzed effect of expansion

By Janet Lavelle, Staff Writer

San Diego Union-Tribune, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2010

DEL MAR — Judging by the 100-plus letters totaling more than 1,000 pages that have flooded the Del Mar Fairgrounds offices, there's no shortage of criticism for an ambitious plan to develop the seaside fair and racetrack property.

Last week was the deadline for the public to send comments on a 4,500-page study analyzing the environmental effects of a proposed \$300 million expansion over 15 years at the state-owned fairgrounds.

A master plan for the project includes building a four-story condominium-hotel and conference center; an exhibit hall with rooftop sports fields; a health club; a three-story office building; a fire station; and a 48-foot-tall electronic sign along Interstate 5.

Long-term projects include a parking garage, seasonal train platform and new stables and racetrack amenities.

Fairgrounds officials will analyze the mountain of comments before responding, spokeswoman Linda Zweig said. "Every one of the comments will get a reply from us."

A common criticism runs through many of the letters sent by surrounding cities, environmental groups, elected officials, public agencies and residents: that the 22nd District Agricultural Association — the state agency that operates the 340-acre fairgrounds — has proposed a massive development that conflicts with the area's open space and brushes off concerns about traffic, noise and other woes.

Letters from residents are impassioned, often marked by exclamation points. A petition signed by 79 Del Mar and Solana Beach residents declared that the "environmental and social impacts on our community are unacceptable."

Wrote Cardiff resident Jill Wilson: "The Highway 5 traffic is bumper to bumper already through Del Mar, are you joking???????"

Some responses rival the size of the fairgrounds' study. Del Mar sent a 62-page letter and 690-page appendix while Solana Beach sent a 179-page critique.

"It's a huge project," Solana Beach Councilman Joe Kellejian said. "They're virtually building a city and that will have a lot of impacts. Because of that, the council and the community have concerns that we want to make sure are addressed."

A letter from Cami Mattson, chief executive of the San Diego North Convention & Visitors Bureau, was one of the few that offered full support.

"The Del Mar Fairgrounds is a key venue, attraction and meeting spot for the visitor industry in this county," she wrote. "It must develop and improve its facilities to remain competitive in this global, state and regional economy."

Several public agencies said the study should be redone because it fails to calculate the project's true effects on traffic, air quality and water use.

The city of San Diego's Development Services Department notes that the study's conclusion that the regional water supply wouldn't be taxed "is not based on data."

San Diego Councilwoman Sherri Lightner, whose district includes part of the fairgrounds, said in her letter that the first projects "are designed to increase revenue for the 22nd DAA at the expense of the local community's economy and quality of life."

The plan ignores the fairgrounds' location adjacent to the newly restored San Dieguito Lagoon and San Dieguito River Park and "proposes a significant intensification and change in use that will severely impact the park," according to a letter signed by county Supervisor Pam Slater-Price as president of the joint-powers authority that oversees the river park.

Wrote former Solana Beach Mayor Margaret Schlesinger: "A 50-foot flashing electronic sign will not add to the enjoyment of the hiking experience."

Building a condo-hotel and conference center would harm nearby businesses, wrote the Torrey Pines Community Planning Board. "The 22nd DAA pays no property taxes, the land has no cost basis and the 22nd DAA pays no rent. There is no way to prevent the 22nd DAA from using this financial advantage to undercut competition," the letter states.

Paving dirt parking lots on the south and east sides of the property or building a parking garage there would illegally pave historic wetlands, a letter from the California Coastal Commission states.

In her letter, Coastal Commission district manager Barbara Lee said the agency also took a dim view of the proposed condo-hotel.

"Both the Coastal Commission and the State Lands Commission have formally objected to the selling of public trust lands for private residential use," Lee wrote. The fairgrounds "should reconsider its proposal and consider the inclusion of an affordable, traditional hotel, a hostel or overnight camping" to increase low-cost visitor access to the coast.

The Del Mar City Council noted that the fairgrounds intends to replace the city fire station at the fairgrounds with a new one on a nearby privately owned lot, but doesn't say how the land would be obtained or who would pay for the new station. Lightner's letter queries whether the new station would be equipped to handle fires in a four-story condo-hotel.

The California Department of Transportation said the environmental report ignores a suggestion the department made a year ago to consider building a freeway ramp directly to the fairgrounds.

The city of Vista urged the fairgrounds to make construction of a train platform a top priority rather than a long-term goal.

Zweig said fairgrounds officials are excited about the expansion, which she said would add jobs and boost the local economy.

"We want to be good neighbors, and we're very concerned about the environment," she said. "I think everyone wants a positive outcome."

Texas enviro takes charge of regional EPA office

By John McFarland, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, Feb. 13, 2010

DALLAS—As a scientist and environmental activist, Al Armendariz has long been frustrated by the government's inability to clean up Texas' notoriously polluted air.

He's called the Environmental Protection Agency broken, labeled both the EPA and the Texas environmental agency failures, and testified on behalf of activist groups about just how badly the agencies have botched things up.

Now, in a dramatic turn that makes him a poster child of sorts for the changing EPA, he's in charge of the agency's operations in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas and New Mexico.

Armendariz, a laid-back chemical engineer who was a professor at Southern Methodist University before the appointment, shrugs off the irony. In fact, he sees his new job as a natural fit and merely a continuation of the EPA's recent sweeping changes that include stricter regulations on smog, greenhouse gases and all sorts of other pollutants.

"I was an environmentalist before I got here and I'm an environmentalist now; I just wear a different hat," said Armendariz, who was sworn in at a ceremony this month at the EPA's regional headquarters in Dallas.

It's not unheard of for regional administrators to come with activist backgrounds, but it does seem strange in Texas. After all, Texas leads the nation in industrial pollution and Gov. Rick Perry is known to frequently lash out at the federal agency.

EPA spokeswoman Adora Andy in Washington said Armendariz was picked because he has the skills to tackle the region's problems, but many environmentalists took a more liberal reading.

"I think the administration understands that Texas is more or less the belly of the beast when it comes to a lot of issues they'll be addressing," said Jim Schermbeck, head of Downwinders at Risk, one of the handful of environmental groups Armendariz has done work for.

Armendariz says he's aware that some in big industry are concerned about his activism, but says they shouldn't be.

"I would hope that some people would take some comfort from the fact that when I was active in environmental issues, it was always driven by specific technical and scientific arguments," said Armendariz, who has studied air-pollution problems in Texas for years. "It wasn't because of some kind of unfocused dislike of certain industries or certain state agencies or certain people."

Officials with the state's massive oil and chemical industries declined to comment on his activism, only saying they look forward to working with him.

Bryan Shaw, chairman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality that's often at odds with the EPA, said in a statement after the appointment late last year that he hopes Armendariz "recognizes that this position is too important to be used as a podium for environmental activism." But after having worked with Armendariz, some of Shaw's concerns have dissipated.

"I think the concern was legitimate, and I'm happy to say that it seems that on some of the issues we've dealt with so far I think Dr. Armendariz has been applying his scientist hat rather than his activist hat," Shaw said.

One of Armendariz's top priorities now is fixing Texas' program for issuing industrial air-pollution permits. The EPA told the state last year that parts of its program didn't comply with the federal Clean Air Act. As a result, at least 140 facilities, including oil refineries and chemical plants, possibly need new permits.

The TCEQ insists the existing program has improved air quality. Shaw says he believes the fixes are just a matter of Texas more accurately describing its pollution-control procedures.

Industry officials have expressed concern that any repermitting process could be costly and force businesses to leave the state, and Perry says the same thing about various EPA pollution rules. But Armendariz says every state must meet the same national standards and doesn't think any companies will leave.

"We don't want industry or utilities to try to find a state where they can get away with the most," he said. "These are major corporations that operate facilities all over the world, so they know how to make money, they know how to operate and operate very profitably in dozens of places, in hundreds of places."

While he talks tough on such issues, the 39-year-old from El Paso also brings a degree of humility to the job.

He said at his swearing-in ceremony that he never thought he'd rise to such a position, and remarked about how surprised he was to learn that a bunch of lawyers now work for him. U.S. Rep. Silvestre Reyes, who swore him in, was instructed to just refer to him as "Al" in his remarks.

When it came his turn to speak, Armendariz said making sure communities are safe is a top priority.

"I want to focus on those places where we can have the biggest impact protecting the environment and improving people's lives," he told the crowd that included his schoolteacher wife, his two young sons, his 92-year-old grandmother and beaming environmentalists.

"I'm a happy man," said Tom "Smitty" Smith of the activist group Public Citizen. "It's a good day."

Nissan electric car sign-ups to start in April

By Dan Strumpf - AP Auto Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Feb. 12, 2010

NEW YORK -- Nissan Motor Co. said Thursday that it will start signing up customers in April who want to buy its new Leaf electric car, with shipments starting by the end of the year.

Nissan has shown the five-passenger sedan, which can go 100 miles on a single charge, at cities around the country over the last three months in a push to market zero-emission technology.

The Japanese automaker has received \$1.4 billion in loans from the federal government to help it build the Leaf, and the battery packs to power it, at a factory in Tennessee.

Nissan Americas Chairman Carlos Tavares said he expects about 20,000 people to sign up to purchase the vehicle.

The Japanese automaker will announce pricing in April, but a spokesman says the price will be similar to that of a base-level Toyota Prius hybrid, which starts at \$22,800.

That would make the Leaf more accessible to the general public than other electric cars on sale today, like the Tesla Roadster, the battery-powered sports car that retails for \$109,000. Tavares says the goal with the Leaf is to make electric cars available to a wider group of consumers.

"It's not a car just for early adopters or green addicts," Tavares said in an interview.

Deliveries of the Leaf will start in December. It will go on sale in Nissan showrooms in the U.S., Japan and Europe at around the same time.

Nissan does not have a target for how many Leafs it expects to sell, though 20,000 for the first year is a reasonable estimate based on the number of people who have expressed interest in the car, Tavares said.

Nissan will build the Leaf in Japan until 2012. Then production of the vehicle and its lithium-ion battery packs are scheduled to start at Nissan's plant in Smyrna, Tenn., outside Nashville.

Although the powertrains are different, the Leaf could compete with General Motors Co.'s much-touted Chevrolet Volt, also slated for sale late this year. Unlike the Leaf, which operates on electric power alone, the Volt is powered by electricity but has an internal-combustion engine that kicks in after 40 miles to propel it longer distances.

The Volt is expected to retail for \$40,000. Both the Volt and the Leaf will be eligible for up to \$7,500 in tax credits.

In recent months, Nissan has been promoting partnerships with municipalities to help develop electric-charging networks. The company, headquartered in Yokohama, Japan, has more than a dozen partnerships in the U.S. in markets that include Tennessee, Oregon, Sonoma County and San Diego in California, Phoenix and Tucson, Ariz., Washington D.C., Seattle, Raleigh, N.C., and with Houston-based Reliant Energy.

Arizona Quits Western Cap-and-Trade Program

By Sindya N. Banhoo, staff writer
N.Y. Times, Thursday, Feb. 11, 2010

Citing financial worries, the State of Arizona has backed out of a broad regional effort to limit greenhouse gas emissions in the West through a cap and trade system.

In an executive order issued last week, Gov. Jan Brewer, a Republican, said a cap-and-trade system — which would impose mandatory caps on emissions and allow pollution credits to be traded among companies — would cripple Arizona's economy.

Instead, the state will support initiatives to expand the use of solar power, nuclear power and other renewable energy sources, said Benjamin Grumbles, the head of the state's environmental agency.

"The governor thought it was important to be clear and honest and let the W.C.I. partners know that we don't think that now is the time to implement a cap-and-trade program," Mr. Grumbles said, referring to the regional effort, the Western Climate Initiative. "Green and grow is our approach now," he said.

The governor's decision was reported Thursday by The Arizona Republic.

The Western Climate Initiative is made up of seven Western states — Arizona, California, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Washington — and four Canadian provinces. Its regional cap-and-trade program is set to begin on a limited scale in 2012.

For now, California is the only state in the group that is poised to open a cap-and-trade marketplace by 2012, but the coalition has said it hopes the program will be in full force by 2015.

The caps would apply to 90 percent of the greenhouse gases emitted by the states and provinces. The group's goal is to achieve a 15 percent reduction from 2005 emissions levels by 2020.

In the first regional cap-and-trade effort in the United States, a coalition of 10 Northeastern and mid-Atlantic states making up the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative similarly aims to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 10 percent by 2018.

Such regional efforts are viewed as a means of compensating for the halting nature of the federal government's steps toward instituting a full regulatory system for greenhouse gases.

Arizona, a founding member of the Western initiative, plans to maintain its voting status within the group, Mr. Grumbles said.

Although it is best known for its cap-and-trade plans, the initiative also promotes renewable energy and energy efficiency, efforts the state will continue to support, Mr. Grumbles said.

Environmental groups criticized Arizona's decision to back off on the cap-and-trade element. "It's ridiculous and sad and embarrassing all in one," said Sandra Bahr, director of the Sierra Club's chapter in Phoenix. "We think that all the tools should be on the table for reducing emissions."

"Arizona is one of the parts of the country that's going to suffer the most," she said. "Hotter and drier — that's not what we need."

Laura E. Sanchez, a lawyer with the National Resource Defense Council's air and energy program, also called the move a step backward. But she said it would not necessarily deal a major blow to the program.

"It's a state by state rollout — each state has to go through their process of getting their cap-and-trade proposal implemented," she said. "I don't necessarily think any one state's actions will have an effect on another state's actions."

Mr. Grumbles maintained that Arizona would continue to embrace a long-term clean energy strategy.

"The governor believes that Arizona can become the solar powerhouse of the nation," he said. "So we are absolutely committed to advancing the solar industry, as well as wind and geothermal."

[Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald commentary, Monday, Feb. 15, 2010:](#)

Anne Marie Fuller: Think twice before you light up the fireplace

As I write this column, New York and others states back east are getting pounded by yet another harsh blizzard — making most of us thankful we live in Northern California.

But even here, on these chilly winter days, it's often nice to stay warm by curling up and enjoying a soft, glowing fire in your own fireplace.

However, you may want to check first to see if it's a No Burn or Winter Spare the Air day. Violators, beware: You could face fines of \$50 to \$400!

Air districts throughout the region have been adding these no-burn programs to the counties they oversee. The Winter Spare the Air program was instituted two years ago by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. During a Spare the Air day, it is illegal to burn wood, manufactured fire logs or pellets. This applies to both indoors and outdoor fireplaces. Violators can expect a warning letter for the first offense, followed by a ticket for a \$400 fine for the second.

"The largest source of particle pollution in the Bay Area comes from wood-burning fires," explains Kristine Roselius, the supervising public information officer for the district. "Particle matter that is 2.5 microns or smaller can be very dangerous. It can violate the body's natural defense system, lodge in our lungs and enter our bloodstream. Thirty to 40 percent of our particle pollution comes directly from wood-burning fires. We would like to encourage everyone to check before you burn."

The Winter Spare the Air season runs through Feb. 28. So far, there have been seven Spare the Air alerts this season. A total of 300 warning letters have been sent out to first-time violators, and seven tickets for \$400 have been issued to second-time offenders. Counties affected by the Spare the Air program are Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Solano and Sonoma.

[San Joaquin Valley](#) also has a similar program in effect, called Check Before You Burn. First-time offenders will receive a \$50 fine, and the amount increases for each offense thereafter. This program also runs through Feb. 28, and so far this winter season there have been 20 no-burn dates. Counties that fall under this jurisdiction are San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and parts of Kern. So far, 65 fines have been issued.

"I really love the warmth and glow of a wood-burning fire," Cathy Lau, of Tracy, says. "It brings back great memories of my childhood. Unfortunately, due to my allergies, I am unable to enjoy them anymore. If I'm outside when a neighbor burns wood in their fireplace, it gives me a sinus headache along with nausea that lasts all day."

"I suffer from chronic asthma and have heard people complain of having asthma attacks when a neighbor uses their fireplace," Tracy resident Jon Colton says. "Several books written by doctors suggest that asthma can be linked to many things, including heredity, the drugs given during delivery, stress, obesity and even how much milk you drink. I don't think we should jump to conclusions here. I kind of wonder what's next — banning campfires and roasting marshmallows?"

Bay Area residents can get more information on the Winter Spare the Air program by visiting www.baaqmd.gov or calling 877-466-2876. San Joaquin Valley residents can visit www.valleyair.org or call 800-766-4463.

[Modesto Bee, Guest Commentary, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2010:](#)

Climate legislation can't wait, capping carbon emissions is job No. 1

By Wayne Madsen

Congress should refrain from linking the results of the Massachusetts Senate election and the fiasco of the Copenhagen climate summit to the real issue: the steady destruction of the environment from the unceasing spewing of environmentally destructive carbon-dioxide gases into the atmosphere.

As permafrost melts and the Arctic and Greenland ice recedes, energy companies are eager to tap new deposits of oil and natural gas. The Houston boys are even looking at ways to extract now-frozen methane-based hydrates from the ocean floor and under the permafrost.

If we think we now have a problem with carbon-based emissions, just wait until methane is extracted from below the permafrost and ocean surface. Methane hydrates are much more destructive to the atmosphere than current emissions of carbon dioxide.

Although there were high hopes for Copenhagen, the summit attracted too many politicians eager to advance their agendas and global businessmen eager to find a new way to amass profits -- mainly through the problematic carbon credit trading contrivance rather than in mitigating the adverse effects of continual pollution of the environment and resulting dramatic changes in the climate around the world.

A recent Ipsos-Reuters poll found that 65 percent of those polled in 23 countries believe that the governments and businesses were taking the necessary actions to stem the effects of climate change.

Of the respondents, 84 percent of those polled in Argentina believed not enough was being done to save the climate. Agreeing with the Argentines were 76 percent of Germans; 65 percent of Russians; 62 percent of Americans; and 55 percent of Japanese.

If these polling results don't convince the Congress that current action is needed, perhaps the wild weather being experienced by some of their constituents will make them take notice of what is in store for the world in the near future.

Recent headlines show that, in fact, global climate change is having an impact on the weather. Tornadoes in the greater Los Angeles area flipped cars and torrential rains flooded streets in Long Beach. (So much for the old song, "It Never Rains in Southern California.") The strange weather in Southern California was followed by two very rare tornado warnings for the Bay Area.

This winter has also seen snow fall in Orlando, Fla., and below-freezing temperatures wreaked havoc on Florida's citrus crop and Louisiana's sugar cane fields. Florida's tropical fish industry saw millions of fish die as a result of freezing weather.

The late House Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill often mused that "all politics is local." Such a devastating impact of climate change should send a clear warning to the members of Congress whose constituents have been adversely affected by wild alterations in the weather.

But it is not just the weather that poses a problem for American farmers and fishermen. America's continued dependence on oil and an impetus by some in Congress to open up pristine off-shore areas to drilling also poses an environmental threat.

A recent major oil spill in Port Arthur, Texas, put shrimp and fish nurseries at risk. Without a clear commitment to curb America's thirst for carbon-based fuels, such environmental catastrophes will become the order of the day.

If carbon-credit offsets are considered a potential arena for fraud by Wall Street and some climate change data linked to carbon trading interests is considered to have tarnished the otherwise provable science of climate change, Congress can eliminate the profit motive by scrapping carbon trading all together.

But carbon caps -- perhaps enforced by across-the-board taxes on carbon emissions -- should remain as a priority for the environment and all species, including humans, whose future depends on a livable and sustainable world.

Madsen is a contributing writer to the progressive Online Journal (www.onlinejournal.com).

[Modesto Bee Guest Commentary, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2010:](#)

A variety of solutions can add up to benefit farmers

By Cathleen Galgiani

On Jan. 28, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) met to consider amending the regulations concerning diesel engines used in water well drilling rigs.

The CARB hearing was the culmination of work by me, the Assembly Agriculture Committee, the California Groundwater Association (CGA), and the results of the amendments to my AB 1416.

In early 2009, the CGA, a 450-member association of water well drilling and pump contractors, suppliers and manufacturers, geologists, engineers, hydrologists, government employees and others, asked me to help rejuvenate negotiations with the CARB that had stalled due to constraints of the Federal Clean Air Act.

New air quality regulations by the CARB would require all drilling rigs to be retrofitted with new diesel engines that emit lower levels of pollutants. Not only would this take all rigs out of service during the retrofitting, but limited availability of the engines would probably created a backlog and inflated costs. Thus the number of rigs operating would be dramatically decreased at the very time that the demand for them has increased due to the drought and federal court constraints pumping water from the Delta.

I was pleased to help, having seen the effects that the drought, compounded by the recession and the delta reductions, was having on farmers, community water systems and rural homeowners in my district and across the state.

As farmers, municipalities, and rural well owners have tapped into groundwater sources to compensate for the shortage in surface water, the demand for the maintenance, deepening, and drilling of new wells has increased.

The CARB's new diesel engine regulations that were set to go into effect on Jan. 1 would have effectively eliminated 30 percent of the state's well drilling fleet.

I instructed the staff of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture, which I chair, to assist the CGA in bringing the concerns to the upper levels of CARB. But by the end of July 2009, it was clear that these efforts were not going to provide needed relief necessary before the new regulations went into effect.

Working with the CGA's legislative advocate and gathering data from individual well drillers, in August I amended emergency language into AB 1416 to seek an extension on the implementation date of the CARB regulations.

CGA became the sponsor, and the bill quickly gathered support from legislators and industry groups, before stalling in the closing months of the 2009 legislative session.

Supported by 50 legislators, stakeholders then asked the CARB for administrative relief. The board set a hearing, and on Jan. 28 agreed to delay implementing the portable engine rules.

The decision is a small fix that provides temporary relief to many farmers. But the water crisis makes it clear that we must have a comprehensive statewide water policy and programs on both the state and federal levels that address the numerous and complex issues.

We made progress in the Legislature by passing a legislative water package which includes a water bond that will be put before voters this November.

While I hope this will help solve California's water problems in the future, we need more short-term solutions for the immediate crisis. These solutions will probably be incremental or small fixes that can cumulatively provide relief to our farmers and communities.

Galgiani, D-Livingston, represents the 17th Assembly District, which includes all of Merced County and parts of Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2010:](#)

Warming can mean more snow

By Clarence Page

Here's a recent headline that caused a few double takes in Washington: "Global Warming Hearing Postponed Because of Snow."

Yes, nothing gives an unearned boost to global warming skeptics like back-to-back snowstorms variously nicknamed "snow-pocalypse" and "snow-mageddon" in the nation's capital.

Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Inhofe, an outspoken skeptic of global warming and warm friend of his state's oil and gas industries, mocked climate activist and former Vice President Al Gore. He posted photos on his Facebook page of his family building an igloo near the Capitol with a sign that read "Al Gore's new home." Har, har.

But, contrary to popular belief, a robust snowfall does not mean that global warming is a myth.

In fact, scientists have been warning for at least two decades that global warming could make snowstorms more severe. Snow has two simple ingredients: (1) cold and (2) moisture. Warmer air collects moisture like a sponge until it hits cold air. When temperatures dip below freezing, a lot of moisture creates a lot of snow.

A rise in global temperature can create all sorts of havoc, ranging from hotter dry spells to colder winters, along with increasingly violent storms, flooding, forest fires and loss of endangered species.

That's simple science even for me, a guy whose scientific education mostly ended with the old "Mr. Wizard" TV show and a subscription to "Popular Mechanics."

Yet confusion about that simple science is one of the reasons why experts and activists increasingly prefer the term "climate change" as less confusing and politically loaded than "global warming."

Still, confusion and politics persist. Fox News host Sean Hannity asserted that the storm "would seem to contradict Al Gore's hysterical global warming theories." Glenn Beck agreed, mocking the very idea that "warming" could lead to more snow.

Sure, it's laughable if you believe in the very unscientific theory of simple observational research, which means that you base your views about global warming on your own weather.

Or, as Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert summarized the Fox News stars' view: "Whatever just happened is the only thing that's happening."

It is not so laughable when you are shoveling back-to-back snowstorms off your walk and your driveway while your passing neighbors ask, "What happened to global warming?"

What happened to global warming? Ask Vancouver. While the South and East Coast were trying to get rid of snow, the West Coast's host of the Winter Olympics was reported to be trucking in snow to its ski runs from another mountain three hours away.

Somehow global warming skeptics not only highlight their snowstorms but also ignore snow droughts.

Even so, Inhofe and other lawmakers who are holding up President Barack Obama's proposed climate bill have been winning gains in their war against climate change believers. Polls in the U.S. and United Kingdom show skepticism about climate change has been rising. That's a reversal of trends that saw President Bush, an early skeptic, move toward proposals to reduce greenhouse gases.

I don't agree with all of the alarm that Al Gore has expressed on climate change. Nor do I disagree with all of the skeptics who question how much climate change is caused by human activities like SUVs versus natural activities like belching cattle.

But whatever you believe in the world of science, it is best to learn through the scientific method, not just Internet gossip and propaganda.

Public skepticism about climate change is healthy -- if it is based on good scientific research. Unfortunately, in our polarized times, too much of the debate is based simply on politics.

With the future of the planet at stake, we owe it to ourselves to judge this debate by more than whatever weather conditions happen to be happening at the moment. We owe it to our offspring, too.

[Merced Sun-Star Commentary, Friday, Feb. 12, 2010:](#)

and killing jobs

McClatchy-Tribune News Service

The following editorial appeared in the Chicago Tribune on Wednesday, Feb. 10:

So, things are getting better on the job front, but slowly. What's a politician to do about that?

With the unemployment rate down slightly but still punishingly high, employers shedding payroll and Republicans feeling their political oats after capturing a Senate seat from Massachusetts, President Barack Obama and congressional Democrats are feeling pressure to show they are acting to create jobs.

As Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., put it, "We heard the message of Massachusetts. They said focus immediately and don't take your focus off jobs."

Nothing wrong with that. But the political class ought to tread warily. Government, after all, can "create" jobs only with resources produced by the private sector. So its chief concern should be providing optimal conditions for private companies to operate. More often than not, that requires the government to do less, not more.

That course has not been the pattern of Obama's first year. Just the opposite - which may help explain the sickly job market. A number of policies have created uncertainty and apprehension among entrepreneurs and investors.

Among them: tax increases on high-income individuals (and thus many businesses), spending hikes and yawning deficits for years to come, proposed health-care reforms that could raise costs, and such ominous initiatives as a cap-and-trade system for greenhouse gas emissions and a change to foster unionization.

Each of these either creates or threatens greater burdens on productive enterprises. None is likely to foster the sort of confidence that leads businesses to start hiring.

One idea floating around is to provide tax breaks to companies that take on new workers, allowing them to forgo paying the employer's 6.2 percent Social Security tax. It's better than most ideas - such as channeling more cash to pork-prone infrastructure projects - but it has a downside too.

For one thing, it encourages employers to figure out ways to get the benefit even for workers who would have been hired anyway. There is also the problem of the cost to a Social Security system that is already underfunded.

Schumer and co-sponsoring Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, don't worry about that because the retirement fund would "be made whole with spending cuts elsewhere in the budget between now and 2015." Sure it will. There is nothing less likely than Congress steeling itself to make serious reductions in spending in the next few years. More likely the cost will be tacked on to deficits that are already ballooning. And those are not good for job creation.

Such measures disregard the plain fact that the only real solution to high unemployment is a strong and lasting economic expansion. A recovery already appears to be gathering steam - though how robust it will be, and how quickly it will revive hiring, is anyone's guess.

It's crucial to keep in mind that recessions are temporary things, and they end even without decisive measures by Congress. What the political class does in the coming weeks is not likely to have a big effect on total employment.

In the long run, however, sound policies that give private companies the freedom to do what they do best, without onerous taxes and regulations, can make a difference. In the current political climate, unfortunately, Washington is more likely to do the opposite.

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Feb. 15, 2010:](#)

Turn up "heat"

It appears that, figuratively, someone is "spitting in the eye" of those who claim man can alter the course of weather-related events.

Of course, we can do more to keep our environment clean, but when it comes to controlling the earth's thermostat, the hand that "stilled the waters" will be on the dial.

Maybe prideful man needs to have the "heat" turned up!

Ira Call, Fresno

Lies about climate change

The American people are owed an apology. This time a real one, not like the ones our president has been giving all over the world for his dislike of America. The apology needs to be for the hoax of global warming.

I want to see Al Gore beg for forgiveness, not just from Americans, but from the world. He has done a great wrong to his nation. I want to see him humbly return his Nobel Peace Prize. If he doesn't, I want it taken back.

I want the entire U.N. to bow before the world and admit they are liars and step down in humiliation. I want the fraudulent "scientific community," which helped perpetrate this fraud, to be exposed and fired from any "science" job they now hold.

Our nation would absolutely be destroyed by initiatives that would have been put in place had the truth not come out. We have been misled purposely by our government, the U.N., false science and, of course, Al Gore.

Admit your lies and publicly accept the shame you deserve.

Joey Grimes, Clovis

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Friday, Feb. 12, 2010:](#)

Kettleman City issues

Regarding "Kettleman City residents deserve" more than "clean water" [Bill McEwen, Feb. 4]: Ignoring birth defects and infant death because the economic status of a community is impoverished is unjustifiable. As much as we want to believe that the water and air in Kettleman City is safe, birth defects can be strong indicators that it is not.

How come denial of any problem existing, lawsuits, demands for investigations and media coverage have to become normal factors before any notable action can be taken? With one reported birth defect or infant death in this small community of 1,500, the Environmental Protection Agency ought to have become concerned and involved. When was the state or federal government going to intervene to regulate the questionable safety of the air and water in Kettleman City?

There is not enough outrage to address the apparent neglect to the residents of this community by the state and federal governments. The residents of Kettleman City had fared better to be wealthy and worthy of having their possessions and well being protected than to have been poor and deserving of a government that truly wanted to regulate the environment.

Celeste Harrell, Fresno

Climate change teamwork

In the Feb. 1 article on global warming, I was pleased to see how many different countries are joining forces with us to remove (or at least reduce!) this growing problem of climate change.

This may be a little bit “out there” to suggest, but maybe, with this many countries working together, we can encourage a little “friendly competition” to reach our goals in time. Just a thought. I am excited to hear more about this in the future and will be looking forward to more articles on this topic.

Amanda Wilson, Fresno

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses for the first time, Obama proposes to explore the use of carbon as national energy in order for the US to be independent from other energy sources. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Por primera vez Obama propone explotar el carbón como fuente de energía nacional

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Monday, Feb. 15, 2010

El presidente Barack Obama propuso por primera vez utilizar el carbón como fuente de energía nacional que lleve a la independencia energética al país. Se dice que Estados Unidos es la Sur Arabia del carbón, porque es uno de los recursos que más tiene el país, dijo el mandatario. Él formó un grupo especial que se dedicará a buscar la forma de desarrollar un uso amplio del carbón, en los próximos diez años, e impulsará en ese plazo diez proyectos nacionales.

“Si podemos desarrollar una tecnología que capture la contaminación que ocasiona el carbón, podemos crear empleos y proporcionar energía”, agregó el mandatario.