

News briefs

Clean-air conference scheduled in Fresno

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, March 15, 2012

A free conference on clean-air landscaping practices is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday at the Radisson Hotel Conference Center, 2233 Ventura St. in Fresno. Registration is required by Monday.

The event, sponsored by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, will showcase the latest, cleanest lawn care technology. The district will unveil a \$500,000 grant program to help commercial landscapers switch from gas-powered equipment to cordless, zero-emission equipment.

For information or registration, go to www.valleyair.org or call (559)230-6000.

McCarthy, rail chairman spar over project

By John Cox, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, March 16, 2012

The strongest arguments over California high-speed rail -- that the project is either an ill-timed waste of money or a necessary investment in the future -- came into sharp contrast Thursday night to cap Cal State Bakersfield's two-month speaker series on the contentious subject.

Though billed as a town hall-type discussion, the event turned into a debate between one of the project's biggest critics -- Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield -- and Dan Richard, chairman of the California High-Speed Rail Authority.

Neither raised significant new issues as the two men sparred over what have become the subject's most hotly disputed points: the role of public versus private investment, employment, transportation needs and the project's latest business plan.

Richard opened by acknowledging substantial changes in the project since its approval by voters in 2008, including rising cost estimates and a lengthening construction timetable. He also conceded valid criticisms such as complaints by Central Valley farmers and community leaders that their concerns have largely been swept aside, a practice he said will end.

But he said California cannot afford to ignore the mobility needs of its burgeoning population, which would be much more expensive to meet strictly through continuing investment in freeways and airports.

"Major investments must be made to meet a growing population," he said.

The project will have to be built piecemeal, he said, because no one knows for sure where the money will come from to build a project estimated in November to cost \$98 billion between now and 2033, when it is planned to link Anaheim and San Francisco with trains traveling up to 220 mph. Construction is to start in the Central Valley next year.

McCarthy questioned the wisdom of beginning to build a project without dependable funding, especially with the federal deficit at \$15 trillion.

Noting that the project's cost has more than doubled since voters approved it four years ago, and that a peer review group appointed by the legislature has advised delaying construction, he asked how certain supporters could be that the system won't require ongoing subsidies.

"My biggest concern in all of this is just looking at the numbers," he said, saying they don't add up.

The role of private investment came up in a question-and-answer session, as the event turned into more of a debate, with the men taking turns rebutting one another.

Chairman Richard said that without risky government revenue guarantees, the private sector cannot be expected to put up money until the system becomes operational and proves itself profitable.

"As soon as they can see that the revenues are there, they will put dollars in," he said.

McCarthy countered that private money will always seek a good opportunity, and that the complete absence of such commitments shows the project is too risky or simply unfeasible.

At a news conference before the event at CSUB's Icardo Center, project supporters said high-speed rail would create economic opportunity, [reduce pollution](#) and ease congestion. They called on McCarthy to set aside politics in favor of a project they said was in the Central Valley's best interest.

Local support for the project has waned over the past year. Bakersfield and Wasco, as well as the county Board of Supervisors, have expressed opposition to the project as proposed, mainly because of its price tag and the disruption construction would present.

Sitting in the bleachers at Thursday's event was Alma Robles, a second-year political science student at Bakersfield College. She said she had come with little or no prior knowledge of the project, and that she learned a lot.

To her, Richard made the stronger case.

"I know there's a deficit," she said, "but I think every good project was risky at one point."

Two Centennial High seniors differed on which of the two presenters made better points.

Steven Carlson said McCarthy did, saying the congressman was better prepared and more collected.

Keianna Fernandez disagreed, saying Richard had persuaded her that the investment would pay off for taxpayers, and that it would generate jobs for people who might otherwise not be able to commute to far-off employment opportunities.

[Bakersfield Californian Commentary, Friday, March 16, 2012:](#)

HSR: Another opportunity for California to prove its worth

During World War II, Californians designed and manufactured thousands of aircraft and other weapons platforms that were the high-tech, dependable tools we needed to win a war on two fronts against determined and ruthless enemies.

When President Kennedy asked our nation to design and build a moon-bound spacecraft, it was said to be an impossible task. But Californians took a central role in proving the critics wrong. Among the major Apollo program components born in California were the massive engines for the Saturn V rockets.

One issue in California that has become a bitter dispute between our two major political parties is whether or not to build the high-speed rail system.

Republicans are mostly against the idea of spending billions of dollars at a time when our state and our nation is already suffering the worst debt crisis in history.

Democrats for the most part support HSR because it promises to help [reduce pollution](#) and enhance the speed and options for millions of California vacationers, commuters and business travelers.

There is merit to be found in both positions but it is doubtful that the two sides are close to negotiating a common course of action.

Assemblyman Henry T. Perea, D-Fresno, has proposed a unique and helpful idea contained in Assembly Bill 16 that just might embody something both Democrats and Republicans can agree on -- "Keeping High-Speed Rail Jobs in California."

This bill will require the California High-Speed Rail Authority to make every effort to purchase rolling stock and related equipment that is manufactured in California, with the ultimate goal of employing Californians to work on the project.

Foreign companies are salivating over a chance to benefit from California's HSR project and some have lobbied our legislators for decades. Firms in China, France, Spain and Japan have expressed intense interest in building trains for California's HSR project. It is Perea's goal to make sure that Californians benefit from the jobs created by HSR rather than foreign companies.

The California Labor Federation made the following statement in support of the bill:

"As construction progresses, California will need to contract with a company to purchase new high-speed trains. Currently all high-speed rail manufacturers are located overseas. But California has an opportunity

to use public dollars to attract new manufacturers to California to build HSR trains here, creating new jobs and a new industry."

It is estimated that 450,000 permanent new jobs could be created statewide over 25 years and the project will require technological support from industries that will either come to California or be spawned here in order to service not only hundreds of miles of track but the trains themselves. Other new businesses will start up to answer the demands of the new rail system and will also help to grow our economy and employ our citizens.

This is creative legislation that even has support of legislators who don't necessarily believe in the benefits of HSR. But they all agree that California companies should be first on the list when/if HSR is funded.

It has become clear that many who propose using foreign companies to supply high-speed trains to California have been lobbied by foreign companies and have taken trips to those countries, paid for by manufacturers there.

AB 16 demands that if high-speed rail is to be built, the hardware will be fabricated right here at home. The goal that we should be embracing as Californians is to become the world's premier supplier of the very best HSR system in the world. Spain, France, Japan and China can buy *our* trains.

AB 16 may provide the catalyst to bring Democrats and Republicans together on both the future of HSR and California's economic road to recovery.

Californians helped to both win World War II and land the first men on the moon with our scientific, engineering and manufacturing expertise. We have millions of hardworking neighbors looking for meaningful careers and we are exceptionally capable technically. We should match our willing workforce and industrial competence with an unbending determination to become the undisputed world leader and largest exporter of HSR systems on the planet.

Mike Miller of Bakersfield is a steel fabrication estimator for a local manufacturer.

