

Board races rich in developer dollars

Critics say regular people pay price in worse traffic, air

By Garth Stapley

Modesto Bee, Thursday, October 12, 2006

The question of whether developers can buy elections is working into races for Stanislaus County supervisor.

This much is certain: People with stakes in growth contribute a lot of money to campaigns, and winners definitely exert power over growth.

Some critics say it's payback: For the price of a campaign contribution, developers get rich. And regular people pay the price in a degraded quality of life -- more people, more traffic, more dirty air.

"People complain that their voices are not being heard, but they're drowned out by tens of thousands of dollars contributed by development companies and builders," said Eric Parfrey. The former Bay Area consultant is Yolo County's principal planner and a seasoned land conservationist in San Joaquin County, where he lives.

But what constitutes big bucks in a political campaign?

How do you prove officeholders are beholden to donors?

And why do developer-friendly candidates -- with a few significant exceptions -- keep getting elected?

A Bee review of campaign contributions to the four Stanislaus County Board of Supervisor candidates for the Nov. 7 election shows that developers have poured in more than \$100,000 this year. A majority of the donors have projects in various stages, or hope to.

"There is just no other big fish in that pond," said Ned Wigglesworth, policy advocate for California Common Cause, a campaign finance reform group. "Developers have a ton more cash (than other donors) and are able to blow people out of the water."

"They certainly buy an ear," said Sandra Lucas, a Democratic Party director in Stanislaus County and co-host of a Modesto TV talk show on politics. "They put up candidates, and when they win, (developers) have a vote."

Her talk show co-host, Republican Party leader and county Supervisor Jim DeMartini, agreed that some donors "certainly expect a payback" in favorable land-use votes.

On the other hand, development donations in the current races amount to less than one-third the total.

Is that enough to buy influence?

It might be, some say, because no other special interest can match that mark in most local elections.

In state and federal campaigns, big players include corporations, gaming tribes, trial lawyers and unions.

County has history of donations

Charles Keating, Arizona's biggest home builder before his disgrace in a savings and loan scandal, drew scorn in 1989 when he admitted hoping his contributions would buy influence.

The six-year sentence Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff drew this year for influence peddling and bribery refocused national attention on the ability of the wealthy to buy favors.

Such donors can live and die by votes on higher levels. Developers target members of city councils and boards of supervisors because they have the most power over building decisions, Lucas and Wigglesworth said.

Stanislaus County has a history of development interests giving generously to campaigns, followed by favorable council or board votes advancing construction.

Many observers say developers are not to blame.

"They're business people," Lucas said.

Said Parfrey: "They're just playing by the rules of the game. But the rules are stacked against the public."

Bill Zoslocki, a Modesto builder and president of the Building Industry Association of Central California, gives to campaigns for his business and as a decision-maker for the association's political action committee. "You want to support the guys and gals who will at least be fair," he said.

Donations never guarantee positive votes, Zoslocki said. When a vote goes against a builder, "Sometimes we don't support them anymore, and sometimes we do in hopes that it was a one-time issue or maybe something was not clear."

And developer-backed candidates don't always get elected.

In 1999, perennial candidate Carmen Sabatino stunned Dick Lang to become Modesto's mayor while money-poor Bruce Frohman overcame Pat Dobbs' developer-rich contributions to win a City Council seat.

In the next election, Denny Jackman -- even more aligned with slow growth than Frohman -- ousted Councilwoman Kenni Friedman, an establishment darling.

Sabatino, Frohman and Jackman, grossly outmatched in campaign dollars, served only one term each.

Rivals give to both sides

In the past year, they lost elections to development-friendly opponents as "political sanity" returned, Lucas wryly observed.

In March, voters responding to a poll commissioned by The Bee and California State University, Stanislaus, overwhelmingly ranked growth as the most important issue facing the Central Valley.

But three months earlier, Modesto voters rejected Jackman in favor of Kristin Olsen, whose husband is affiliated with a powerful Zagaris company. She had accepted campaign money from developers only days after casting a favorable vote on their project as a planning commissioner. She admitted a lapse in judgment and returned the money.

In June, Jackman led a drive that collected 16,000 voter signatures favoring a county anti-sprawl initiative. Supervisors used a technicality to delay a vote by nearly two years.

Lucas said city council members and county supervisors, both with power over growth, should control sprawl by checking and balancing developers -- and each other. "But if (developers) own both the city councils and the board of supervisors," she said, "There is no one to say 'no.'"

DeMartini noted that rival developers often contribute to both sides.

For example, would-be developers favoring a draft growth plan for Salida have contributed to District 3 incumbent Supervisor Jeff Grover, who supports the broad plan. He leads all supervisor candidates in developer dollars and developer donations as a percentage of his donations.

But developer Ron Malik, his family and Anderson Homes could make more money if the growth plan were changed to accommodate more homes instead of industry. They have contributed \$12,500 to Grover's opponent, Gary Lopez, who says he prefers more homes and less industry.

"If they're giving me money, maybe it's because they think my plan is more feasible to get them where they want to go," Lopez said in a recent debate on the Lucas and DeMartini TV show.

The Building Industry Association hedged its bet by donating to Lopez and Grover.

Lopez, meanwhile, has relied more on unions, the second-most powerful lobby in local elections, according to Lucas and DeMartini. Half of Lopez's contributions came from unions, many from outside the county.

"Labor unions and developers are the ones with the most money," said DeMartini, who financed much of his 2004 campaign with personal loans. Without such resources, a candidate "is dependent upon contributions, a lot of times, from somebody who wants something," he said.

In the District 4 race, Janice Keating has received more than 50 contributions from developers, many with designs on Stanislaus County land.

As a Modesto councilwoman, she last year helped alter the city's "Tin Cup" restrictions on donations.

Trying to skirt those rules landed a Modesto firm in hot water with state election investigators. Mid-Valley Engineering in 2002 was fined \$185,400 for trying to curry favor with Modesto and Oakdale candidates through laundered campaign contributions.

Through their lawyer, firm owners Kirk and Cathy DeLaMare claimed ignorance of the law. Kirk DeLaMare told an investigator he had been schooled in the technique by former Mid-Valley owner Dennis Wilson, who now owns Horizon Consulting in Modesto.

Money makes memory short

Though some politicians returned the tainted money then, others appear willing to forgive and forget. Grover accepted \$1,000 from the DeLaMares in March while Keating took \$200 from Wilson in her council re-election campaign last year.

Keating's current opponent, former state Sen. Dick Monteith, received \$500 from Wilson in August. Modesto Mayor Jim Ridenour has accepted \$1,349 from Wilson in the past three years.

Parfrey, the conservationist, said he wants to believe that people are smart enough to link political decisions to the sprawl that worsens air pollution and highway congestion.

"But I think they're frustrated because they just don't see how they could make a difference," he said.

Campaign contribution reform similar to that pushed by Common Cause and several other groups on the state and national levels could help locally, Parfrey said.

"If we began to clamp down on these outrageous contributions," he said, "it could begin to level the playing field."

Slick energy saver to power plant

By Julia Scott, staff writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, October 12, 2006

MILLBRAE — Fast food may not be good for Americans, but the grease it produces will soon replace fossil fuels as an environmental way to power Millbrae's wastewater treatment plant.

By the end of the month, leftover cooking grease collected from Bay Area restaurants will allow the plant to provide 80 percent of its own power, saving taxpayers a bundle of money and cutting down on emissions associated with utility demands.

The \$5.5 million upgrade to the plant, which workers began work on last September, will create a receiving dock for trucks to unload 3,000 gallons of grease a day into the facility's existing solid-waste digester. Microorganisms in the digester will eat their way through the grease, significantly boosting the amount of methane the plant uses to power its generators.

The treatment plant already generates 40 to 50 percent of its own power by trapping the methane and carbon dioxide gases that are byproducts of the waste breakdown process. The gases enter a combustion engine that in turn powers the generator, creating electricity.

The grease will stimulate enough microorganisms to provide for 80 percent of the plant's energy needs when the new system goes online at the end of the month, according to plant Superintendent Dick York. That number could increase even more in a year's time, he said.

"I don't think that any other (plant) in the Bay Area will make more electricity than Millbrae," said York. Several other cities, including Palo Alto and San Jose, already use recycled grease in their treatment systems.

The upgraded technology, which was designed and installed by Chevron Energy Solutions, a division of Chevron U.S.A. Inc., also adds a 250-kilowatt microturbine generator capable of outputting enough energy to survive a PG&E outage.

Other than recycling methane and carbon dioxide — two major greenhouse gases — the plant's new process also re-uses clotted, sticky grease restaurants would otherwise just throw out, said York. The plant's digester breaks it down completely.

"It would be as if you put the grease in a cup and burned it. There's nothing left over," he said.

The city stands to gain \$366,000 a year in energy savings and even earn some money on "tipping fees" from grease haulers who will pay the plant 10 cents a gallon or more for the privilege of disposing of their waste.

Millbrae had savings in mind when it approached Chevron about designing a more efficient treatment system that would increase output at no long-term cost to the city, said Kevin Bell, business development manager for Chevron Energy Solutions. The group's engineers work with cities, businesses, and internally at the company's own refineries to install energy-efficient equipment upgrades, projects which include solar power and ethanol, said Bell.

York estimated that Millbrae would earn enough on its treatment plant upgrades to recoup expenses in 20 years.

While external energy costs are sure to fluctuate over that period of time, York is confident his treatment plant won't lose its energy source.

"We're not going to run out of grease in the life of this project," he said.

Neighbors put off by the grill next door

Complaints follow the smell from Husky Boy Burgers.

By Heather Ignatin

The Orange County Register

Thursday, October 12, 2006

LAGUNA BEACH – Some people love the aroma of burgers on the grill. Some people love the scent of a cool ocean breeze. But the two of them mixed together have raised a stink.

Since January, residents living near Husky Boy Burgers have made 57 complaints to the South Coast Air Quality Management District about offending odors wafting into their homes. They say the smell is so bad it has affected their quality of life – forcing them to close their windows and doors and refrain from enjoying the outdoors.

"It's nauseating," said Lori Levine, a mother of two who lives a few doors from the Coast Highway eatery. "It's to the point, if someone is home for lunch, and it smells, they call."

Despite the grumbles, Husky Boy continues to serve up its juicy burgers and baskets of fries. Jay Carpelo, president and chief executive officer of Viva Laguna, which bought the eatery in 2005, said he is stunned that some people are so unhappy.

In May 2005, a number of improvements were made at the restaurant, including buying a new grill and refrigerator, replacing a motor behind the building, repainting and general cleanup. But residents say that's when their neighborhood started to stink. They believe he adjusted the venting hood on the grill – which caused the unpleasant smell. Carpelo said he just cleaned it.

"All of a sudden an AQMD inspector showed up and said the neighbors complained about the smell of the food," Carpelo said. "I said, 'That's ridiculous.' Why would they complain now? We have the same food, cooked the same way for decades."

The restaurant has been in the community since the 1950s, he said.

Air Quality Management District inspector Ahmad Soltani said the situation is not the first time someone has had a problem with a burger joint or food source, but it's "not as common as other cases," he said.

In June, Husky Burger received a "public nuisance" citation – issued after five or more people complain in one day.

After three such notices AQMD could hold a hearing and recommend that Carpelo modify his business, such as installing a filtration device, Soltani said. If Carpelo didn't follow those recommendations he could be fined.

No more than 10 people total have complained to the state agency about Husky Boy's aroma, Soltani said.

Neighbors believe the problem would be solved if Husky Boy beefed up its filtration system to control the smell from the grill. But Carpelo says it's not feasible.

"It would cost \$100,000," he said. Neighbors contend the cost would be less than half.

"It's not that I hate hamburgers," said Audrey Prosser. "It's just that I want to breathe in my house. It's a real problem."

Neighbors also say they've noticed an increase in noise from the restaurant since the new Husky Boy owner took over and have complained to the city.

Carpelo said he has taken steps to address neighbors' noise concerns including eliminating outdoor speakers, adjusting a fan on the restaurant's roof and installing pneumatic door closers to stop them from slamming shut.

Eau de Husky Boy is OK with at least one neighbor. "It smells a little like food, but to me it's not that bad," said John Caufield, who has rented a nearby apartment for two years.

Both sides have gathered signatures to support their cause.

"We're just hoping the process works itself out," said Levine, a resident since July 2005. "We are not trying to close or harass him in any way."

Each year his agency fields thousands of complaints from residents in Orange, Riverside, Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties, Soltani said.

Typical calls include cars spewing fumes, dust from construction sites and odors from manufacturing plants.

Skyscrapers

The rise (and sprawl) of urban America is changing the weather

By Richard A. Lovett

San Diego Union-Tribune, Thursday, October 12, 2006

When we think of healthy ecosystems, we tend to think of natural areas such as parks, forests or maybe the ocean. But cities also include ecosystems. And with three-quarters of the U.S. population now living in urban areas, people are having an increasingly important impact on the world in which we live.

In August, the residents of Olympia, Wash., learned this the hard way from a pack of raccoons. The animals made headlines worldwide for killing at least 10 cats, attacking a small dog and forcing one woman to get rabies shots after she tried to rescue her pet.

One angry resident made the masked marauders sound like street gangs.

"It's a new breed," she told The Associated Press. "They're urban raccoons, and they're not afraid."

Most likely the residents of Olympia helped bring on their own problems by feeding the raccoons.

"Almost all of our problem raccoons or coyotes are precipitated by feeding," says Bob Sallinger, urban conservation director for the Audubon Society of Portland, Ore. "Someone feels sorry for them and starts putting out dog and cat food. People have this sentimental view of wildlife, and with the best of intentions act in ways that ultimately put themselves, their pets and the animal they want to help at risk."

But the ecological effect of humans on cities extends far beyond wildlife. Lawn fertilizers run into bays and estuaries, where they feed harmful algal blooms. Hot roofs and parking lots alter thunderstorm patterns. Even conservation-oriented programs such as xeriscaping (landscaping with drought-tolerant native vegetation) can backfire and contribute to smog.

A wetter future

The thunderstorm effects are best known to residents of the thunderstorm-prone Midwest and Southeast, where they result from the mix of urban heat and air pollution.

Scientists (and urban residents) have long known that sun-baked cities form "heat islands" that make hot days hotter and warm nights warmer. But new studies unveiled this spring at a meeting

of the American Geophysical Union indicate that urban sprawl can add power to summer thunderstorms in regions as close to San Diego as southern Arizona.

In one study, J. Marshall Shepherd, a geography professor and meteorologist at the University of Georgia, ran weather models in which he examined the likely effects of the next two decades of growth in Houston. He found that increasing urbanization could wind up doubling the power of typical thunderstorms.

Two factors seem to be at work. One is that the heat island effect causes stronger thermals to rise above the city, drawing in moist air from the nearby Gulf of Mexico, in a process Shepherd describes as an "urban pump."

But the city's buildings are also topographically uneven. This increases the tendency of air to converge into the pump, also creating stronger storms.

Nor is this solely a problem for coastal cities like Houston. In a paper published this summer in the *Journal of Arid Environments*, Shepherd found a similar pattern for Phoenix. Since 1950, summer thunderstorm precipitation has increased 12 percent to 14 percent in regions downwind of the growing city, he discovered.

For Phoenix, however, the heat island effect might not be the only factor. Increasing smog provides a host of tiny particles that can serve as "condensation nuclei" for the formation of raindrops, altering thunderstorm growth in ways that change the local climate.

Lawn watering in Phoenix is probably also playing a role by adding humidity to the air.

"Our household water use is far higher per capita than others'," Sharon J. Hall, an ecologist at Arizona State University, said at the spring geophysics meeting.

On average, she said, Phoenix residents use 20 percent more water than the average American. "Most of that water use is outdoors."

Concerned about the impact of this on limited water supplies, some desert cities, including San Diego, have been encouraging residents to shift from water-hogging lawns to xeriscaping, which uses native desert vegetation that doesn't need to be watered. But, improperly done, xeriscaping creates its own problems, Hall says. "People love these yards, so they irrigate them year-round, prune them and space plants so closely their efficiency of water use goes down." That, of course, undercuts the goal of conserving water. But it may also have environmental consequences. The problem is that many of the most common xeriscaping plants add substantial amounts of nitrogen to the soil, much of which the plants don't use. Some people also fertilize their xeriscaped yards with nitrogen-containing fertilizers.

The extra nitrogen accumulates in the soil until enthusiastic gardeners over-water it. Then, it provides a banquet for bacteria that covert it to the same types of air-polluting nitrogen oxide gases contained in automobile exhaust.

The fault, Hall says, isn't with xeriscaping; it's with homeowners who try to care for their xeriscapes in much the same way they would for grass.

Nor does xeriscaping, even if improperly done, create anywhere near as much nitrogen oxides as automobiles. Still, there's room for improvement. What's needed, Hall says, is a campaign of "nitrogen education" comparable to summer water-conservation campaigns.

“People don't really have that in their heads,” she says.

Sunny weekends

One of the most exotic interplays between urban life and the environment was discovered by Thomas Bell of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md. Bell examined nine years of data from NASA's Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission satellite program, which monitors rainfall as far north as central Illinois, as well as in the tropics.

What he found was that in humid parts of the country east of mid-Texas, rainfall patterns mimic the business week. Contrary to popular perception, he found that it doesn't always rain on the weekend. Rather, it's less likely to rain then than during the work week.

The find, dubbed the “weekend effect,” appears to be another consequence of raindrop condensation nuclei in urban smog.

“Every week,” Bell said, “humans conduct an experiment by producing more pollution on weekdays than on weekends. Anyone who lives in a city knows this.”

Nor is it a trivial effect. According to the satellite results, afternoon rainfall at midweek was nearly twice that seen on weekends. Furthermore, weekday storms were more likely to be downpours.

It's easy to attribute this to the smog-generating effects of commuter traffic, but people still drive on weekends, and while there is a measurable improvement in urban air quality on weekends, it doesn't seem to be enough to account for the strength of the effect Bell is seeing.

Something that does fluctuate more strongly with the work week, he says, is truck traffic. “Truck traffic drops off a lot on weekends. So it might be something related to pollution from truck traffic. But that's a pure guess.”

Runoff component

In 1997, scientists began a long-term ecological study of Baltimore, whose streams feed into Chesapeake Bay. There, excess nutrients in the streams contribute to algal blooms that endanger the region's renowned shellfish industry. (Similar concerns exist in California regarding runoff into the pristine waters of Lake Tahoe.)

The researchers have charted nitrogen levels in creeks flowing from rural woodlands into the urban core. What they found (not surprisingly) is that woodlands produce very little nitrogen-containing runoff. But the highly built-up regions of the urban core don't produce all that much, either. Much more comes from over-fertilized lawns in the suburbs.

Happily, the scientists believe that Draconian fertilizer regulations may not be needed. Rather, they say, it may be possible to engineer streams in ways that improve their ability to purge nitrogen from the water before it reaches the bay.

Historically, urban streams have been managed with an eye to reducing flooding and keeping them from eroding their banks. The easy way to do this has been by confining the stream to a steep, narrow streambed, more like an irrigation ditch than a natural creek – a process that Peter Groffman of the Institute of Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, N.Y., calls a “stream lobotomy.”

A better approach, Groffman says, is to create a series of pools and ripples that allow the water to “wander a bit” and interact with its flood plain. Not only does this reduce erosion by slowing the

speed of the current, but it reconnects the stream to its riparian zone, Groffman says. Letting the water trickle through sticks, leaves and native vegetation gives more opportunities for bacteria to interact with the creek waters, cleansing them of unwanted nitrogen.

Groffman notes that such creeks can be converted into linear parks. In Baltimore, for example, the recently developed 15-mile Gwynns Falls Trail follows a creek of the same name from the suburbs to the city's Inner Harbor. Currently, Groffman says, the river is in rough shape, as are some of the adjacent neighborhoods.

"The question is, can the trail catalyze revitalization by creating advocates for maintaining the water quality of the stream? This is an interesting test of the idea that there are links between ecological and sociological revitalization. It will be interesting to see how it plays out."

Paving paradise

The weekend effect doesn't appear to be an ecological catastrophe. In fact, weekend picnickers undoubtedly appreciate it as a rare instance of a beneficial side effect of pollution. Scientists, on the other hand, are intrigued by the fact that such effects can be measured. Previous research has tended to ignore the regional, mid-scale effects of urbanization, focusing on local ones (such as smog) or extremely broad ones (like global warming).

But urbanization is a continuing process. Right now, says Dale Quattrochi, of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala., the United States has built up or paved over a land mass equivalent to the state of Ohio. As the U.S. population pushes beyond 300 million, that will only increase, and scientists, undoubtedly, will find more ways in which it affects surrounding areas.

Richard A. Lovett is a freelance science writer in Portland, Ore.

[Modesto Bee commentary, Thursday, October 12, 2006:](#)

Schwarzenegger ran as a hybrid and that he is

By Daniel Weintraub

Much has been made about Gov. Schwarzenegger's leftward lean in this election year. Conservative Republican activists are afraid that the governor they helped elect three years ago is now little more than a closet Democrat.

Liberal Democrats, meanwhile, have been saying the governor lacks core values and will likely return to the conservative fold once he is safely in office for another four years.

But a close look at the thousand-plus bills the governor signed and vetoed this year suggests that both sides are overreacting.

Schwarzenegger ran in 2003 as a cross-partisan hybrid, a pro-environment social liberal and a pragmatic economic conservative.

And that's pretty much the way he has governed. Even this year.

Consider the environment. Exhibit A in the Schwarzenegger-is-now-a-liberal case was his signature on AB 32, the anti-global warming legislation to limit the amount of greenhouse gases the state's industries can emit. The bill was the top priority of just about every environmental group in the state, if not the nation.

But it was not the product of a Schwarzenegger conversion. It was the culmination of his own long-standing belief that global warming is real, that it is caused by human industrial activity, and that California can help lead the fight against it.

Last year, when the conventional wisdom had him tilting right, Schwarzenegger issued an executive order that laid the groundwork for the legislation he signed in September.

Schwarzenegger also signed another high profile environmental bill that will hold California utilities responsible for the greenhouse gases produced by out-of-state electricity generators who sell their juice to California. But he vetoed three of the top five bills promoted this year by the Sierra Club. Those measures would have allowed state regulators to require that half the cars sold in California by 2020 use alternative fuels, slapped a fee on shippers of container cargo to pay for air quality measures near the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, and overhauled the state's Reclamation Board, which regulates building in floodplains.

And if Schwarzenegger has veered left, someone should tell his allies in the business community. They have been big supporters of his signature achievement of the year -- placing four measures on the ballot to rebuild and expand the state's roads, schools, housing and levees. They seem equally pleased with his action on the bills he handled last month.

According to the California Chamber of Commerce, Schwarzenegger vetoed nine of the 11 bills they identified as "job killers" for the economy. The two he signed over their objections were the global warming bills, which the governor argues will help California's economy in the long run.

He vetoed bills, meanwhile, to expand unemployment insurance coverage, roll back recent changes in the workers' compensation system, and give the attorney general the power to collect legal fees and investigative costs from people and companies sued by the state. He got a pass from the chamber for signing a bill to increase the minimum wage, because he refused to accept a provision that would have given workers an automatic annual cost-of-living increase, for which labor groups had been pushing hard.

Schwarzenegger also pleased the California Taxpayers Association, which said he acted in accordance with the members' wishes on the top 12 bills they were watching at the end of the legislative session, signing six they liked and rejecting six they opposed. Among the vetoes applauded by the anti-tax lobby were two bills that would have allowed government agencies to assess car taxes to pay for transportation projects in the Bay Area and environmental protections along the coast.

On health care, Schwarzenegger signed a bill to require prescription drug makers to sell their products at a discount to low-income and middle-income Californians, a clear reversal from his position a year ago. But he vetoed two bills that health care activists were pressuring him to sign. One would have put the state on a path toward a government-run, single-payer health care system. The other would have required employers with 10,000 workers -- namely Wal-Mart -- to spend the equivalent of 8 percent of their payroll on health insurance for their employees.

Religious conservatives were upset that Schwarzenegger signed 10 of 14 bills backed by gay rights activists, including a measure to allow same-sex domestic partners to check the "married" box on state income tax forms. But the governor vetoed the top priority of the gay community -- a measure to legalize gay marriage. Schwarzenegger said he would abide by a gay marriage ban imposed by the voters in 2000 unless the voters reverse themselves or the courts rule that the ban is unconstitutional.

Despite the headlines, then, the new Schwarzenegger seems to be pretty much like the old one: anti-tax, anti-fee, in favor of environmental protections that he thinks will not hurt the economy, against a major government role in health care and a supporter of gay rights short of the right to marry.

Both the far left and the far right have reasons of their own to decry what they see as a big and sudden shift. But the facts are not on their side.

In Brief: Leadership Porterville class wants recruits

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, Oct. 12, 2006

Leadership Porterville, which provides leadership and community awareness training to residents, is recruiting for the class of 2007.

Sessions include regional issues of [air quality](#), transportation and water, education, local government, economic and workforce development and agriculture among others.

Applications are available at the Porterville Chamber office or online at www.Chamber.Porterville.com. Scholarships are available.

Global warming film aimed at evangelical Christians

BY Mark Barna, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Oct. 12, 2006

TEHACHAPI -- Church leaders on Wednesday were treated to a preview of an environmental film being marketed to people who don't like Al Gore, but who might be open to his message if packaged differently.

Evangelical Pastor Ron Sparks of Community Church of California City comments on the theatrical preview of "The Great Warming" at the Hitching Post Theaters in Tehachapi.

"The Great Warming," opening in 50 cities Nov. 3 but not in Bakersfield, is substantively similar to Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth," a much-praised documentary about global warming released earlier this year.

The difference is that the new film courts Republican evangelical Christians, who have been characterized as uninformed or in denial about global-warming issues.

"A lot of people didn't go see Al Gore's movie because it was too partisan," said David Williams, coordinator of the preview at Hitching Post Theaters. He lives in Tehachapi.

Pastor Ron Sparks, of Community Church of California City, was impressed with the film.

"There is a biblical mandate to take care of the earth," the evangelical preacher said.

Filmmakers chose Tehachapi as a West Coast preview site because of its history of using wind and solar power as alternative energy sources, Williams said.

Featured in the film are prominent evangelicals, scientists and historians speaking about environmental degradation.

The Rev. Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals, which represents 30 million of the faithful nationwide, says in the film that environmental destruction of the planet is "an offense against God."

Pastor Gerald Durley, of Providence Missionary Baptist Church of Atlanta, challenged the Bush administration to do more for the environment.

"If evangelicals say we want change," Durley says to the camera, "George Bush will have to listen."

Actor Keanu Reeves and pop singer Alanis Morissette are the film's narrators.

To create a buzz, DVDs of the Canadian-produced film have been distributed to about 200 churches, and clerics have been given private screenings like the one in Tehachapi.

Sparks, in a leather motorcycle jacket, said he routinely talks to his parish about abortion, stem-cell research and gay marriage. He also talks about global warming.

Without naming names, Sparks said, "I would like to see a political administration that cares for the Earth."