

## **State panel OKs Fresno doctor for two air-pollution boards**

By E.J. Schultz - Bee Capitol Bureau  
Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2009

SACRAMENTO -- Fresno cardiologist John Telles breezed through a state Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday on his appointment to two air-pollution boards.

The Rules Committee approved Telles with no dissenting votes, nearly a year after Gov. Schwarzenegger appointed him to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board and the California Air Resources Board.

He is expected to be approved by the full Senate sometime this year.

Telles, a Democrat, replaced Fresno County Supervisor Judy Case. Case, a Republican, was ousted last year by the Democratic-controlled Senate over accusations by environmentalists that she catered to agriculture interests.

Telles was not the favored choice of environmentalists, but they have come to like him.

"Over the past year, Dr. Telles has offered a tremendous amount of oversight and accountability to both boards," Sarah Sharpe, environmental health director for Fresno Metro Ministry, said in testimony.

The Valley air board oversees local air-pollution rules. The state board oversees air-pollution regulations and greenhouse-gas emissions.

Telles fills one of four Valley board positions created by legislation in 2007 to increase the board's size to 15 members from 11. The expansion, pushed by environmentalists, adds two city appointees and two health experts to the board, which has been dominated by county appointees.

The other health slot was filled late last year when Schwarzenegger appointed Henry Forman, a professor of chemistry and biochemistry at the University of California at Merced.

A city selection committee is still considering candidates for the two new city slots, as well as replacements for two city members who have recently left the board.

## **Fireplaces Step Out for Air**

By Kimberly Stevens  
N.Y. Times, Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Los Angeles - WHEN Doug Armstrong, a television writer, and his wife, Maureen FitzPatrick, a television executive, decided to landscape the grassy hill behind their midcentury modern house in the Silver Lake neighborhood, a pool was proposed and immediately nixed as too extravagant. They opted instead for a sleek, outdoor aluminum fireplace.

"Anyone with a conscience right now is not going to dig a hole in the ground, line it with cement, fill it with 60,000 gallons of water and some chlorine and wait for it to evaporate," said Jay Knowlton, the couple's landscape designer.

Using wall-like trellises, Mr. Knowlton divided the 1,400-square-foot yard into two "rooms": a lower dining area with flagstone pavers, and an upper-level lounge lined with sofas in eggplant-purple outdoor fabric.

Connecting the two areas is a double-sided, minimalist gray fireplace, about the size of an old television cabinet. Guests gravitate toward it naturally.

“Creating those two separate rooms that share a fireplace is like adding an addition to the house,” said Mr. Armstrong, who spent about \$2,300 on the fire feature, out of a total landscape budget of \$150,000.

Of course, not everyone has as much to spend. At a time when many people’s renovation budgets are being slashed and landscape designers are scraping for work, one of the few bright spots may be the outdoor fireplace. Sometimes referred to by architects and designers as the poor man’s pool, outdoor fireplaces offer an inexpensive and low-maintenance way to extend living and social spaces outdoors, especially at night when the mercury drops.

These open-air hearths seem to be having a design moment, too. While traditional wood-burning models may invoke images of hippie campfires or resemble portable barbecue sets — [and new ones have recently been banned by pollution rules in parts of Southern California](#) — designer versions that are fueled by gas and look almost sculptural are starting to show up in growing numbers of stylish backyards and the patios of fashionable restaurants.

Reliable statistics on outdoor fireplace sales are hard to come by, in part because it is a young industry that lacks uniform standards and is dominated by small manufacturers. But John Crouch, a spokesman for the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Association, a trade group, said that he has observed significant increases.

The popularity of outdoor fireplaces seems to have been spurred by high-design hotels. The boho-chic Parker Palm Springs hotel, which was designed by Jonathan Adler and opened in 2004, has a communal fire pit — a large rusted steel bowl filled with black lumps of lava rock — surrounded by 10 vintage butterfly chairs. Hotel guests have been known to get down on their knees for a better look at the name of the fire pit’s maker, which is written on its underside. (Answer: Elena Colombo.)

And the new Standard hotel in the meatpacking district of Manhattan will feature two similar fire bowls in its beer garden. Andre Balazs, the boldface hotelier who owns the Standard, takes credit for helping start the trend, which he says began in Southern California and is now going national.

“Fire features are sexy and they make people look sexy,” said Mr. Balazs, who has installed outdoor fireplaces at several of his Los Angeles hotels over the last seven years. “The flickering light, the way it caresses your skin, it makes people look great. It’s not surprising they want this in their own home.”

Eric Grunbaum, a creative director for an advertising agency in Los Angeles, offers a different reason. “A fire is about as basic as it gets,” said Mr. Grunbaum, who recently moved into a new modernist house in Venice, Calif. He had wanted an indoor fireplace, but his architect, Barbara Bestor, convinced him that an outdoor fireplace was more stylish and practical.

Working with Stephanie Bartron, a landscape designer here, they created a casual, clean-lined fire pit intended to connect with the interior. Made of hard-edged white cement and no bigger than a soaking tub, the fire pit is filled with black lava pebbles. The gas flame casts a deep orange glow. A surrounding rectangle of low benches, also in white cement, invites conversation and contemplation. The fire feature, including the benches, cost \$1,900.

Now, when Mr. Grunbaum invites friends and neighbors over for cocktails or dinner parties, guests inevitably end up around the fire pit. “It’s the ultimate in California living,” he said. “It’s really the draw that keeps you outdoors.”

Emily Jagoda, an architect in Silver Lake who often incorporates innovative outdoor spaces into her projects, goes further. Outdoor fireplaces, she argues, are inherently social; swimming pools

and water fountains, in her view, are not. "People don't gather around the water feature to talk and mingle," Ms. Jagoda said.

Craig Gillespie, a movie and television director who has a natural-looking swimming pool and a new outdoor fireplace at his Brentwood home, agrees. "It's definitely the fire for us and the pool for the kids," said Mr. Gillespie, who lives in a 1930s Federal-style home with his wife, Cristine, and two boys, Max, 15, and Miles, 10.

The fireplace, which was built last year by Jay Griffith, a landscape designer whose clients have included Brad Pitt and Jake Gyllenhaal, evokes an Old World industrial hearth. Tucked in a lush backyard with feathery ferns and mossy stone pavers, the fireplace is made of rusted steel columns and a thick mantel decorated with candelabras, antique urns and other weathered tchotchkes.

A Venetian-crystal chandelier from the 1970s dangles from a magnolia tree, as if the ceiling and walls had magically disappeared. "Now that the space feels much more like a real room, we use it all the time," Mr. Gillespie said.

Ms. Colombo, who designed the fire bowls at the Parker Palm Springs and the Standard hotels, created her first outdoor fireplace in 2002, an Oscar Niemeyer-esque cement bowl for her own home in the Hamptons. Mr. Balazs, after hearing about it through word of mouth, commissioned one for his Sunset Beach hotel on Shelter Island, near the eastern tip of Long Island.

For one of her latest commissions, Ms. Colombo designed three fire features for a new \$10 million modern glass home on Blue Jay Way, the exclusive drive in Hollywood Hills. The five-bedroom house has an infinity-edge pool, huge outdoor decks and breathtaking views, but the first thing that greets visitors is a fire sculpture — flames shimmer against a silvery bundle of stainless-steel branches that seems to float on a reflecting pool. This piece, along with two smaller fire features, cost \$100,000, Ms. Colombo said.

The sculpture can be seen through the glass walls of every room in the 6,550-square-foot home. "It's pretty amazing that in a house like this you can successfully create a cozy ambience," Ms. Colombo said. "In the end, it all comes down to the flame."

## **Pleasanton City Council approves Stoneridge Drive extension after heated debate**

By Aaron Swarts, Correspondent

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Thursday, Feb. 26, 2009

The Pleasanton City Council has given the green light to plans to extend Stoneridge Drive from Trevor Drive to El Charro Road.

The motion passed Tuesday night by a 3-2 margin, with council members Cindy McGovern and Matt Sullivan voting against the plan. The Stoneridge extension will be completed as part of the 124-acre, multimillion-dollar Staples Ranch project.

The council had originally intended to approve the housing project Feb. 3 but was forced to continue that meeting after nearly four hours of debate.

Emotions were still running high this week, as more than 150 people packed the council chamber, with many relegated to the lobby.

Assistant City Manager Steven Bocian explained to council members that if they approved the full extension of Stoneridge now, it would allow "cost-effective planning and all of the infrastructure for the project to be completed at once," noting that the county was also willing to cover the \$6 million price tag.

Several representatives from the county were also on hand, adding that if the expansion was not approved soon, the offer of \$6 million in funding would be withdrawn.

Regardless of the county funds, McGovern was skeptical about the benefits.

"This is going to have an enormous impact on traffic," she said of the plan. "Can we be sure the developer will fund the mitigation of the traffic issues this project could create?"

Sullivan expressed concern about the impact on the community.

"Do we really know what the air quality and noise impacts on those neighborhoods is going to be?" he asked. "I don't believe this is the silver bullet that will solve our traffic problems."

The council later rejected Sullivan's call for a citywide vote on the matter.

Before allowing members of the public to comment on the Stoneridge extension, Mayor Jennifer Hosterman made a plea for civility.

"I know emotions are bubbling over, but I will not allow anyone to boo, snicker or cheer while someone else is speaking," she said. "If you feel the need to scream, then go outside and scream."

Ruby Hill resident Nancy Harrington spoke in support of the motion.

"It is selfish and unfair for one part of town to create a ruckus that affects everyone else," she said. "Interstate 580 is dangerous and a traffic nightmare. The extension of Stoneridge will allow us to avoid 580 more often. You must do what is best for all residents."

Pleasanton resident Nancy Allen agreed.

"It is your job to make things in the city better, not worse," she said. "This extension could save each driver six hours a year. A minute here or there really adds up. It's best for everyone if this plan is approved."

Pleasanton resident Tracy Miller said she was in favor of expanding Stoneridge, "but not until the problems with (State Route) 84 and (Interstate) 580 have been addressed."

Pleasanton resident Cindy Cook agreed, saying, "You cannot allow this to happen until regional improvements have been made," she said, citing a fear of commuters using the route to cut through the city. "You must not sacrifice our streets and quality of life for this project."

Despite council approval, the future of the Stoneridge expansion could still be in doubt.

City Attorney Michael Roush explained that there is now a "30-day period" for citizens to gather signatures opposing the plan, which could force a special vote.

A Sierra Club representative mentioned the possibility of a legal action being filed to stop the Staples Ranch project. Matt Morrison said his organization was concerned about the Environmental Impact Report and would be taking a closer look at the matter.

Staples Ranch, as proposed, includes a 37-acre auto mall, a 45-acre senior continuing care community (with a maximum of 800 units and a separate assisted living facility), 11 acres of retail, a 17-acre community park, including a 7-acre ice-skating facility, and a 5-acre neighborhood park with a water-detention basin.

Tuesday night's council decision represented the culmination of more than 20 years of debate over the Staples Ranch project.

## **US-China ties needed to fight climate change**

In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, February 26, 2009

BEIJING — A top China expert said Thursday that the fight against climate change will give the United States and China a chance to strengthen an often tempestuous relationship by working together on solutions.

The world's two largest emitters of greenhouse gases - accounting for an estimated 40 percent of the global total - have long been at odds over how to handle the issue of global warming.

Kenneth Lieberthal, a leading China scholar and former White House adviser, illustrated the different ways the two countries could work collaboratively on climate change in a report he co-authored for the Brookings Institution.

He laid out nine key recommendations, including calling for a U.S.-China summit that highlights clean energy.

"The U.S. clearly wants to increase the level, intensity, transparency and consistency of its dialogue with China. Climate change will be an important part of that strategic dialogue," he told a forum at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Earlier this month, during her first visit to China in her new role, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton repeatedly emphasized climate change and clean energy as areas where the two could focus joint efforts.

China has long insisted that developed nations bear the main responsibility for cutting emissions. But the U.S. under former President George W. Bush refused to sign an international pact requiring cuts in emissions, saying developing nations should not be exempt.

### **Kan. gov. declares bill allowing coal plants 'DOA'**

By John Hanna, Associated Press Writer  
USA TODAY, Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2009

TOPEKA, Kan. — Gov. Kathleen Sebelius declared Wednesday that an energy bill before the House is dead on arrival if it reaches her desk because it would allow two coal-fired power plants in southwest Kansas.

Sebelius also objects to provisions limiting the Kansas secretary of Health and Environment's power to regulate greenhouse gases linked by many scientists to global warming. Secretary Rod Bremby denied an air-quality permit for the two plants in October 2007 over their potential carbon dioxide emissions.

The governor also mocked other, "green" proposals in the bill designed to attract support for it from legislators who are reluctant to support new coal-fired plants. She said the bill is "a step backward" as President Barack Obama moves the U.S. away from its reliance on fossil fuels.

The House is scheduled to debate the bill Thursday. Supporters expect it to pass, but they're hoping for a two-thirds majority, or 84 of 125 votes, the margin needed to override Sebelius' expected veto.

"It's DOA with me -- absolutely," Sebelius said during a Statehouse news conference.

### **Wildfires lead to air quality advisory**

USA TODAY, Thursday, Feb. 26, 2009

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The state Department of Environmental Quality is issuing an air quality advisory in 19 counties because of recent wildfires.

Environmental program specialist Curt Goeller says low winds leave the smoke, dust and ash hanging in the wind to create air quality problems. Goeller says he's hoping stronger winds expected Thursday will clear the air.

The 19 counties are Atoka, Caddo, Cleveland, Coal, Comanche, Garvin, Grady, Latimer, McClain, McIntosh, Murray, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Pittsburg, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Seminole and Wagoner.