

LOGIN:

Username:

Password:

Remember

[Register](#)
[Request Password](#)

Search site for:

[Long-term archives](#)

HOME

NEWS

- City/County
- Nation/World
- Crime & Courts
- Police Calls

SPORTS

LIFESTYLES

MOVIES

OBITUARIES

BUSINESS

CLASSIFIED

- Jobs
- Cars
- Homes
- Apartments
- Place An Ad

OPINION

E-mail this story Print this story Home Delivery of The Sun-Star

Local leaders pressure lawmaker for funds

By Michael Doyle

Last Updated: March 30, 2006, 06:51:17 AM PST

WASHINGTON -- There's a trick to en masse lobbying, which Merced County officials are trying to master this week.

Sixteen of the county's elected and business leaders crowded into a fourth-floor congressional conference room for an hour Wednesday afternoon, nearly surrounding Rep. Dennis Cardoza,

D-Merced. Cardoza once walked in their shoes, as a one-time member of the Atwater and Merced city councils.

Now, Cardoza is in the middle of his second congressional term, and in a position to steer at least some federal funds back to the northern San Joaquin Valley. Priorities matter, and so does teamwork.

"I work for you. You make the decisions," Cardoza told the Merced officials, "but there is not an unlimited pot of money we have so few opportunities to use chits; we get what we get, and they're few and far between."

Cardoza was referring, in part, to a specific controversy over Merced County airports. But with county officials this week making the case for more than \$33 million in federal funding, the caution applies more generally as well.

The county's nine specific requests range from \$12 million for regional business parks to \$5 million for studying a bypass around Los Banos. Transportation dominates the wish list; in particular, work on State Route 99.

Customer Service
About McClatchy
The McClatchy
Company

TODAY'S HIGH FIVE

1. Councilman pleads guilty to charge
2. Officers arrests woman at scene of tornado
3. Best Is Yet to Come for Schools
4. Power Splurge
5. Friday Follow-Up: County reviewing comments on raceway

The High Five are the five most-read stories, updated hourly.

Local Stories

▶ [Councilman pleads guilty to charge](#)

▶ [Friday Follow-Up: County reviewing comments on raceway](#)

▶ [Best Is Yet to Come for Schools](#)

▶ [Senators begin debate on reforming immigration](#)

▶ [Bank's economist expects region to survive current sluggishness](#)

[Complete Index](#) ▶

These other roads projects include \$4 million to continue expanding the state highway to six lanes from four, as well as \$2 million for progress on a four-lane expressway serving the University of California at Merced campus. The smallest single request is for \$375,000, to assist the county's economic development efforts; small, however, is not the same as easy.

"The most frustrating area here is economic development," Merced City Councilman Bill Spriggs conceded

Like other counties that preceded it this year, including Fresno and Stanislaus, Merced prepared slick, one-page summaries of each project. The county spent the past year honing its project list, until officials came up with something everyone could agree on.

"Everybody understood we couldn't come back here with 130 projects," said Dick Whittington, spokesman for the Merced County Association of Governments.

In some cases, officials from cities that are not direct beneficiaries of the requests -- like Gustine City Councilman Joe Oliveira -- joined the week-long lobbying trip. The idea, officials say, is to project regional unity.

This is the second year the Merced County association has sponsored a Washington lobbying trip under the "one voice" title, which is a lobbying concept adopted in recent years by Fresno, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties, among others.

This year, Merced County Association of Governments added to its heft by hiring Washington lobbyist Thane Young, a former congressional aide whose firm's other clients range from Boeing to the city of Stockton and Sierra College.

The county also sought to extend a glad hand to lawmakers and congressional staffers alike, through an evening reception held Tuesday at a Capitol Hill power restaurant called Charlie Palmer Steak. The reception, funded through private contributions, was quiet rather than boisterous; in part, perhaps, because of new congressional sensitivities about accepting private hospitality.

The grassroots lobbyists from Merced County and other San Joaquin Valley communities are also confronting newfound congressional concern about earmarks, which are the targeted budget items that critics call pork.

The Valley's representatives, which next week will include more than 70 coming from San Joaquin County, must also cope with certain congressional dynamics. On Wednesday, for instance, Cardoza advised the Merced County delegation that he and other Valley members had won House approval for a dairy bill. San Joaquin Valley dairy groups like the bill -- but Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Redlands, who chairs

the powerful House Appropriations Committee, does not.

"The appropriators are not particularly happy we prevailed," Cardoza told the Merced County officials, "so that may not portend well for other things."

For all the obstacles, though, the officials believe the lobbying visit could pay big dividends.

"The trip is going very, very well," Spriggs said.

 E-mail this story	 Print this story	 Home Delivery of The Sun-Star
---	--	---