

One-voice committee wants bypass

There is a long list of projects that need doing in and near Merced County - "Big-ticket" items that require millions of our tax dollars from both the state and federal government. There seems to be nothing cheap about improving things like flood control, water quality and supply, education and transportation, certainly nothing that can be accomplished using only local dollars.

But going to Washington or Sacramento to plead for funds to complete a laundry list of projects - each important in its own right - tends to make lawmakers' eyes glaze over and their attention spans wane to such a degree that when appropriations do trickle down to the county, nothing on the list is funded.

Merced County's One-Voice committee, a group comprised of community leaders, politicians, educators, business peo-



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ple and citizens at large was formed to winnow the list to a single item and focus legislators' attention on it.

A vote held during a One-Voice committee meeting Thursday singled out the project to be emphasized this year when committee members travel to the state capitol in January and to Washington D.C. in March. That project: The Los Baños Highway 152 bypass.

The environmental impact report for the bypass is supposed to be completed this spring, and as expensive as that document is, it pales in comparison to what's coming. Engineering and design, land acquisition and construction

of the bypass is next and finishing those phases carries a nine-digit price tag - to the left of the decimal point.

The bypass has been in one stage of planning or discussion since the late 1960s. Had it been built when hippies still roamed the Haight its cost would have been a fraction of what it is today, and the inverse is true the longer the project remains on the drawing board.

Committee members recognized the importance of keeping the bypass on the front burner, even though there are many other projects that need doing in the county. We hope state and federal lawmakers will appropriate funds for the bypass with the same sense of urgency, and that Merced County residents who want to see the bypass completed will urge their legislators to do so.

Gene Lieb is publisher of the Los Baños Enterprise. He can be reached by phone at 826-3831 or by e-mail at publisher@losbanosenterprise.com