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Wednesday, Mar. 05, 2008

A report on One Voice trip

Mike Nelson

EDITOR'S NOTE: Nelson is a Merced County supervisor and chairman of the Merced County Association of Governments' governing board.

Recently, the MCAG One Voice delegation returned from its annual visit to Sacramento. We took a stand on some issues, asked for help with others, got some advice and gained greater insight into the issues facing California this year.

Before going on the trip, One Voice participants narrowed a long list of needs to eight issues. Perhaps the one with the most obstacles at the state level was asking for a comprehensive water plan to address storage, conveyance, discharge, runoff and protection of groundwater basins. Currently, water regulation is controlled by various agencies, which means that regulations can be in conflict and new technology can be overlooked.

We also asked legislators to give our schools more flexibility with Supplemental Education funds. This money provides extra class sessions for high school students who are in danger of not graduating. However, under new rules, the money can only be used for English and math, not for social studies and science, which students also need in order to graduate.

In the area of health care -- new for us this year -- we asked that Medi-Cal reimbursement rates be raised to encourage health care providers to accept more Medi-Cal patients. We also asked our state legislators to support our request that the federal Department of Health Services reinstate Merced County's designation as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). This will help us attract more medical professionals, including specialists.

Financial advisers to the two largest state pension funds, CALPERS and CALSTRS, have advised them to invest in small cities to help them build the infrastructure they desperately need. We wanted to let people know that Merced County would be an attractive investment, due to the projected growth in the area.

We also asked for the San Joaquin Valley to have its own prevailing wage established, rather than be subject to Bay Area wages. Whenever local, state or federal government funds are used for a project, workers are paid a prevailing wage. While we understand the purpose of the prevailing wage, having

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our area connected to the Bay Area wage makes little sense. Bay Area wages are much higher than our own and as a consequence, project costs escalate approximately 30 percent leaving many important projects unbuilt. To keep our area competitive and capable of building needed projects, we simply need a prevailing wage scale that reflects the wages earned here in the Valley and not in San Francisco.

In 2002, California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 42 by nearly 70 percent ensuring the state's portion of sales tax on gasoline would be directed to transportation programs. From its inception and despite the clear message sent by voters, these funds have been an easy target for lawmakers to artificially bridge budgetary shortfalls in Sacramento. We asked legislators not to take Proposition 42 funds this year, as most cities and counties are reeling from the lack of funds for the past three years. And, following comments made by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last December, we asked that the voting threshold for passing a transportation measure be lowered. He felt that, since the state budget crisis would require the state taking monies destined for local governments, perhaps allowing them to pass transportation measures would help, especially since most of the state's population passed their measures when the threshold was lower.

We now have follow up work to do, including a few more visits to Sacramento with smaller groups to discuss specific issues.

I applaud the 45 people, who took time out from their busy schedules, traveling to Sacramento to advocate on the issues deemed most important to the residents of our county and cities. Merced County residents are always asking for governments, agencies and other to work together. This is a great example of that, where everyone focuses on the agreed-upon issues to present a unified voice.

For more information go to <http://www.mcagov.org/onevoice/08priorities.htm>.


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So if the people of Merced will not vote in measure G, you will find a way around it by having the threshold lowered? What a slap in the face to those who voted and now you want to overrule them.

We have the highest paid county supervisors of most counties and you want a lower prevailing wage for construction workers in our area? Good luck getting anyone to come here and work. And the same for physicians. The quality of health care in Merced is so low most doctors will not come here.

So let's continue legislating, enacting laws and limits, forcing more taxes, and not looking at the real problems. Such as more money does not make great students without great teachers. :: 03/05/08 4:54pm - sunknee 

So if the people of Merced will not vote in measure G, you will find a way around it by having the threshold lowered? What a slap in the face to those who voted and now you want to overrule them.

Makes us all feel so good you care and will abide by what the people want. bahh!!

We have the highest paid county supervisors of most counties and you want a lower



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prevailing wage for construction workers in our area? Good luck getting anyone to come here and work. And the same for physicians. The quality of health care in Merced is so low most doctors will not come here.

So let's continue legislating, enacting laws and limits, forcing more taxes, and not looking at the real problems. Such as more money does not make great students without great teachers.

:: 03/05/08 3:12pm - sunknee 

Let me get this straight -- in an economically depressed area, our politicians are lobbying to cut wages paid to construction workers? :: 03/05/08 11:06am - juanitorres



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