

EDITORIALS & LETTERS

Single mom of teenagers worries about their safety when walking rural roads

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Julie Dome and I live on Church Rd. in Campo. My teenagers attend the Mountain Empire Junior / Senior High school which is 12 miles away from our home. This year, for what I was told were budgetary reasons, the bus that runs down my road to pick up the Junior High and High School aged children was canceled and my children were told that in order to catch the bus for school they would have to walk two miles from our home to the Hwy 94 - Church Rd. intersection.

Because of limited resources within my family, being a single mother raising 4 teenagers on my own, without help or assistance from Welfare, TANF, or resources from Social Services, the extra gas expense to drive the 8 miles a day was not an option and when I asked for help from the Mountain Empire Transportation Department I was told there is a rule that children can be expected to walk up to three miles to get to a bus stop.

Well that is great if you live in the city, or even a more populated town area where three miles can be covered relatively safely with paved

sidewalks, well lit streets and some form of general public presence.

My children walk down a two lane, curvy rural road, with NO designated pedestrian walks, absolutely NO Street lighting, NO one around for miles, and they do it in the pitch dark at 530am every school day.

Rain, Ice, Sleet, Snow, and Wind, is what they battle against all fall/winter long in order to continue their educations. Now the spring/summer months will compile Heat into that list.

Which brings me to the subject of this letter. Yesterday, on their way to their bus stop at 5:45am, my children were accosted by two illegal immigrants, there may have been more back in the bushes, but the two my kids could see were yelling at them for "Agua" and following them further down the road. The kids were scared out of their minds, luckily that day they had borrowed the neighbors bicycles and were able to pedal away, but on most days they walk. Since the incident we have contacted Border Patrol to gather information on what to do if there is a next time to better prepare. But the trauma has been done.

On some occasions the older kids have waited until 7:30am when it is lighter and safer to get on the elementary bus to get to school, but two days ago they were told by the bus driver, Miss Jones, that her Boss (who I can only assume means the Transportation Department for the District) told her that she is not allowed to let them ride any more, so they are back to fending for their lives against weather, darkness and desperate illegal immigrants to get to the bus in the morning.

Since the safety of Our Children seems to be a GREY area, of little concern for the Mountain Empire Unified School District on several different topics, not just the movement of the bus stop, will one of our children have to end up missing, hurt or dead before some kind of solution can be found?

Is there really NOTHING that can be done???

As always I am available to any and all who would like to start a conversation. I look forward to finding a solution that best suits all involved.

Sincerely,
Julie Dome

Save Our Rural Economy (S.O.R.E.) fights for the back country

A couple of years ago, when it became apparent that the County government was going full speed ahead with its drastic down-zoning scheme for the back country, a few local property owners, healthcare professionals, educators, and leaders of the Indian tribes came together to discuss how this would adversely affect our rural community and decided to form the organization S.O.R.E., which stands for Save Our Rural Economy. Initially, S.O.R.E. asked the County to conduct an economic analysis of the affects that stripping all the equity from the rural lands would have on our rural communities and they essentially refused, stating that the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) did not require them to consider the socioeconomic effects of their project. This answer did not set well with S.O.R.E. since we believed in our hearts that the legacy of this scheme would be a sad one for our schools, healthcare, community services, public safety and general socioeconomic condition. So we raised over \$40,000.00 to pay for an independent analysis by a team of professors of economics from SDSU. The study showed that hundreds of millions of dollars in foregone revenue and economies of scale would result from this down-zoning scheme on our rural school districts, public safety and roads, alone. When you take into consideration all the other

affects, the results will be staggering!

S.O.R.E. decided that this was too important to just let County government implement without a fight! We all believed that in a democracy it was critical for people to speak up against bad government and this was truly bad government at its worst. By the same token, we felt strongly that it was unproductive to just whine and complain without having some alternative that achieved the goal of environmental preservation without destroying our rural economy.

S.O.R.E. worked hard for almost a year to develop a conceptual alternative that preserves a reasonable amount of equity in the rural lands and at the same time provides an affordable pathway to the conservation of agriculture and open space. S.O.R.E.'s conceptual alternative has been vetted to many of the stakeholders in the County and it has been well received, because it is both fair and balanced. S.O.R.E.'s alternative was briefed to the Campo/Lake Morena Planning Group last month. It essentially eliminates the hated 40/80 and 160 acre down-zoning provisions that County voters have twice rejected in Prop B back in 1998 and Prop A in 2004. Voters know a bad deal when they see it and in this case the voters have seen it twice and summarily rejected these drastic densities. S.O.R.E.'s alternative

returns a reasonable amount of density, but then offers these landowners the option to sell their density through a transfer of development rights (TDR) program to developers in areas where development is needed and can be supported by existing infrastructure. This is both a fair and smart way that many jurisdictions across our great Country and in other areas of California have used to voluntarily encourage development where it should be without violating property rights or destroying farmers and rural communities. We can find no other jurisdiction in the U.S. that is pursuing these ridiculous 40/80 and 160 acre zoning provisions.

S.O.R.E. has made a lot of progress in this fight. We have presented our alternative to the Planning Commission and all of the Supervisors. We are simply asking the County to take a step back from their arbitrary "Fall of 2010" deadline and add a reasonable and balanced alternative to the EIR process so that the Board of Supervisors will be able to consider it when that time comes. The current economy has surely provided a window of opportunity for this to happen. We encourage your comments and suggestions and encourage you to write your Supervisor to let them know you encourage them to do the right thing and evaluate this better way.

Randy Lenac
President, S.O.R.E.

Ray Lutz declares his candidacy for the 52nd Congressional District; he will oppose Duncan Hunter Jr. for the congressional seat.

Southwest PowerLink & Campo Landfill

BY TONY NEFF

The PowerLink

Starting late last summer, SDGE began sending letters to 80 property owners along the CPUC-approved Sunrise Powerlink project route. The residents will, or have already, received "fair market value" offers from the utility for the land it wishes to acquire for the project. For the most part SDGE is seeking easements, but in a few situations, is seeking to acquire the entire property. Despite efforts to come to mutually agreeable resolutions negotiations with seven property owners along the PowerLink route have come to a stalemate. SDGE has used its legal right to file eminent domain lawsuits with the seven property owners. All of the property owners have been given time to accept the offers, respond with a counter offer, or allow the condemnation

steps to begin. Work will begin on the project while the cases make their way through the courts.

SDGE has a contact person; The Land Services Manager for Southwest Powerlink, Jon Taylor who can be reached by email at jtaylor@semprautilities.com. He would be able to answer questions about the process. The column "The Law and You" by Don Gravalec (in this edition) touches on eminent domain issues that are relevant to our understanding.

The Campo Landfill

The Sunday March 14th 2010 Union Tribune carried a story by Chairwomen Monique LaChappa about the new technologies utilized in modern landfills. Ms. LaChappa suggested that people need to visit a landfill and see the engineering marvel a modern landfill has become. Clay, fiber,

and plastic liners are laid on the bottom. Water runoff pipes and methane monitoring tubes are installed. At any single moment there is little uncovered working area. The chairwomen did not shy away from the ground water issues that most neighbors fear could lead to future problems. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement will be discussed at two planned meetings. The first meeting will be Tuesday April 13, 2010 from 6 to 9 pm at the Campo Tribal Center 36190 Church Rd. On April 14th at the Mountain Empire High School from 6 to 9 pm located at 3291 Buckman Springs Road. The meetings have been scheduled for oral and written comments about the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and other aspects of the project.

Please logon to the Community Forum to present your views of these issues. www.backcountrymessenger.com.

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