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TALKING POINTS – FEBURARY 26, 2008, PPH, RAMONA, CA

COMMISSONER GRUENEICH, JUDGE WEISSMAN,

DIANE CONKLIN, MUSSEY GRADE ROAD ALLIANCE, RAMONA, CA

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME. IF SOME OF THIS SOUNDS FAMILIAR FROM THE ALL-PARTY MEETING YESTERDAY, PLEASE FORGIVE ME.

FIRST OFF, I WANT TO COMPLIMENT THE STAFF ON THE DEIR. THE ALLIANCE IS PARTICULARLY PLEASED WITH THE RANKING OF THE ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERANTIVES, AS NUMBERS 1 AND 2 – THE NEW IN-AREA ALL SOURCE GENERATION ALTERNATAIVE AND THE NEW IN-AREA RENEWABLE GENERATION ALTERNATIVE

THE EMPHASIS IN THE RANKING OF IN-BASIN GENERATION AND LOCAL RENEWABLES IS THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE. AS RATEPAYERS, WE FINANCE THE ELETRICTY INFRASTRUCTURE, BUT THE INFRASTRUCTURE HAS BEEN CONFINED TO TRANSMISSION. NOW PEOPLE ARE ASKING WHAT IF WE DID SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

THE IDEA OF A NEW WAYS OF DOING THINGS IS IN THE PUBLIC’S MIND AND MEDIA. FOR EXAMPLE, LAST YEAR’S NOVA PROGRAM “SAVED BY THE SUN” STARTS OUT WITH CONVENTIONAL SOLAR TROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND ENDS UP WITH PHOTOVOLTAICS IN PAINT THAT YOU APPLY TO YOUR ROOF.

WE ALSO THANK YOU FOR GIVING STAFF THE EXTRA TIME TO EXPLORE THE ISSUES OF A SECOND SUBSTATION, THE EXPANSION QUESTION, PARTICULARLY TO THE NORTH, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RENEWABLES IN IMPERIAL COUNTY -- ALL OF WHICH AFFECT THE ENVIRONMENT.

THE DEIR ALSO ADDRESSES FIRE IN SOME 300 PAGES, AND WE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THE CPUC HAS ADDRESSED FIRE IN SUCH A COMPREHENSIVE WAY. AS THE MUSSEY GRADE ROAD ALLIANCE BROUGHT THE ISSUE UP TO THE COMMISSION WE ARE, OF COURSE, VERY PLEASED TO SEE THE ISSUE OF WILDLAND CATASTROPHIC FIRES IGNITED BY POWER LINES EXPLORED BY THE COMMISSION.

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WHEN THE ALLIANCE SUBMITTED ITS TESTIMONY AND APPENDICES IN MAY LAST YEAR, NO ONE SEEMED TO REALLY THINK THAT THE FIRE ISSUE WAS IMPORTANT. AND I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT BECAUSE IT DOESN’T SEEM TO BE IMPORTANT UNTIL YOU EXPERIENCE IT.

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DURING THE FIRESTORMS IN OCTOBER LAST YEAR, WE STAYED IN OUR HOUSE, WHICH WAS SURROUNDED BY THE WITCH CREEK FIRE ON THREE SIDES BEYOND OUR MOUNTAINS. WE STAYED BECAUSE THE SYSTEM MY HUSBAND, WHO IS THE ALLIANCE EXPERT, DR. JOSEPH MITCHELL DEvised TO PROTECT OUR HOUSE – AND WHICH SAVED IT IN THE CEDAR FIRE -- MUST BE TURNED ON MANUALLY.

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WE WERE LUCKY THIS TIME; THE FIRE DID NOT CROSS OVER THE MOUNTAINS – DIFFERENT FROM THE CEDAR FIRE IN 2003. BUT TO EXPERIENCE ANOTHER MASSIVE WILDFIRE 4 SHORT YEARS AFTER THE LAST ONE WAS ABSOLUTELY DEVESTATING. RAMONA WAS HIT HARD IN THE FIRE WITH SOME 400 HOMES DOWN, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF LIVES DISRUPTED AND SAN DIEGO COUNTY ACRES SCORCHED. PEOPLE ARE STILL DIGGING OUT OF THE FIRES PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, FINANCIALLY AND SPIRITUALLY. AND WE ARE AFRAID OF FIRE MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.

WE DIDN'T LEARN UNTIL MID-NOVEMBER THAT THE WITCH CREEK FIRE THAT THREATENED US AND TRAVELED FROM EASTERN RAMONA TO RANCHO SANTA FE WAS STARTED BY SDG&E'S POWERLINES OR THAT THE COMPANY'S POWERLINES STARTED TWO OTHER MAJOR FIRES IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY --- THE GUEJITO IN NEIGHBORING SAN PASQUAL VALLEY AND THE RICE CANYON FIRES.

AS A FOOTNOTE TO THAT FACT, YESTERDAY, WHILE YOU WERE PATIENTLY LISTENING TO OTHERS EXPRESSING THEIR OPINIONS ON THIS POWER LINE PROJECT AT THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, MAYOR JERRY SANDERS AND SUPERVISOR GREG COX WERE RELEASING AN "AFTER ACTION" REPORT CONCERNING FIRE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SAME BUILDING.

SAN DIEGO'S MAYOR SUPPORTS PUTTING MORE POTENTIAL IGNITION SOURCES IN THE BACKCOUNTRY BECAUSE HE SUPPORTS THIS LINE AND ANNOUNCED HIS SUPPORT SOME 18 MONTHS BEFORE THE RELEASE OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT.

THE NEIGHBORING COMMUNITY OF POWAY WAS RECENTLY REPORTED AS STOCKING UP SUPPLIES FOR THE NEXT FIRE, BUT ITS MAYOR WROTE A GUEST COMMENTARY IN A LOCAL PAPER ON SUNDAY SUPPORTING THE POWER LINE.

THE ENERGY WORKING GROUP OF THE SAN DIEGO ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS WILL TAKE UP THE POWER LINE ISSUE THIS WEEK ---- WITHOUT ACTIVELY HAVING CONSIDERED OR NOW INCLUDING

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**DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
DURING ITS DELIBERATIONS.**

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PERHAPS THESE FOLKS DO NOT YET UNDERSTAND THAT THE ISSUE OF FIRE IS MAJOR TO SAN DIEGANS. AS YOU KNOW, SDG&E HAS GONE TO THE COMMISSION TO ASK FOR A RULE TO BE MADE REGARDING FIRE. ALL OF THE STATE'S MAJOR UTILITIES ARE INVOLVED IN THIS EFFORT: SDG&E, SCE, PG&E. THE ALLIANCE SUPPORTED SDG&E'S PETITION, BUT ALSO SUGGESTED A NUMBER OF POINTS THAT SHOULD BE REVIEWED BEFORE ANY RULE IS MADE. WE ARE AWAITING THE JUDGE'S DECISION IN THAT MATTER AS TO WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

AND WE COUNT ON THE COMMISSION TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION ALL OF THE RELEVANT FACTORS CONCERNING FIRE WHEN LOOKING AT THIS POWER LINE PROJECT.

FINALLY, I WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU THAT THE CALIFORNIANS I KNOW WANT CALIFORNIA TO MAKE THE DECISION ON THIS POWER LINE APPLICATION. WHILE IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT THREAT SECTION 1221 OF THE 2005 ENERGY ACT POSES TO US, WE WOULD HOPE THAT CALIFORNIA WILL NOT LET WASHINGTON DECIDE WHAT CALIFORNIA SHOULD AND DOES DECIDE. THE NATIONAL INTEREST ELECTRONIC CORRIDOR (NIETC) IS COMPOSED OF 7 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COUNTIES – WHICH MAKES NO SENSE TO PEOPLE AT THE GRASSROOTS. BUT WE DO KNOW THAT IF SPL IS APPROVED – ANY ROUTE – IT WILL BE THE FIRST LINE OF MORE LINES PROJECTED IN THE FUTURE. THE EXPANSION IS BROUGHT OUT IN THE DEIR MORE CLEARLY THAN ANYWHERE ELSE WE'VE READ, THOUGH NO ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS HAS BEEN DONE.

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THANK YOU, AGAIN, FOR YOUR TIME AND THIS OPPORTUNITY.

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New reports avoid Cal Fire criticism

City, county officials focus on what 'needs to get done'

By Tony Manolatos
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

February 26, 2008

New reports on the October wildfires were compiled to outline what went right and what went wrong.

While the "After Action" reports that city and county officials released yesterday suggest dozens of changes, including more brush clearance, they don't address the performance of the lead firefighting agency.

Cal Fire, which directed ground and air resources across San Diego County, drew stiff criticism, and some politicians and firefighters said taxpayers would be better served by a regional department run by local firefighters.

The reports released yesterday don't address consolidation. That issue, along with Cal Fire's role, is being examined by a committee that is chaired by San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders and county Supervisor Ron Roberts.

The Regional Fire Protection Committee plans to analyze the reports before making their recommendations by June 30.

"These reports allude to some of the other issues, but they focused on the stuff that needs to get done right away, knowing that we're out there focusing on some bigger issues," Roberts said.

Sanders and county Supervisor Greg Cox released the reports at a news conference at the County Administration Building.

All 39 recommendations listed in the county's report would be implemented within the next year, Cox said. There are no cost estimates, "but we know we can do these in the next 12 months without any major financial problems," he said.

Some of the fixes at the county level are ambitious, including a heavy emphasis on eliminating brush that fuels fires.

"Fuel management works and is the county's best defense against future firestorms," Cox said.

Sanders is pushing brush clearance, too. Last week, the Federal Emergency Management Agency awarded San Diego a \$2.4 million grant for brush abatement. Sanders said he plans to match the total in the upcoming budget, giving the city enough money to clear all of its brush in the next two years.

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Sanders, who is running for re-election while grappling with a host of city financial problems, said some of the recommendations in the city's report would have to wait.

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While the city expects to find the money to operate a second firefighting helicopter, it doesn't have the funds to buy 34 additional fire engines, which is among the report's recommendations.

Fire Chief Tracy Jarman has said a lack of engines was her biggest frustration during the October firestorms, which killed 10 people and destroyed 1,700 homes in the county.

Noting that major firestorms can affect much of Southern California at the same time, both reports cite a need for local firefighters to be able to fight wildfires without outside assistance for the first 48 to 72 hours.

Sanders said at least one of Cal Fire's shortcomings – a lack of spotters aboard military helicopters – is being fixed.

"We will have our own spotters in San Diego," Sanders said.

Former San Diego Fire Chief Jeff Bowman, chairman of a group of volunteers that released its own recommendations last week, pointed out that Sanders' and Roberts' fire protection committee won't release its findings until after the June 4 mayoral primary.

"It's pure politics," Bowman said. "They've decided, 'Let's not do anything until after the election, so we don't get caught in the crossfire.'"

"They write these reports and they put them on a shelf. And then they say they have no money. So nothing gets done."

Staff writer Greg Gross contributed to this report.

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