

EDITORIAL: De León needs to educate himself about Central Valley

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By The Bee Editorial Board



Los Angeles Democrat Kevin de León, the incoming state Senate President Pro Tem, needs to educate himself about the entire state before he becomes the Senate leader in October.

ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Los Angeles Democrat Kevin de León, the incoming state Senate President Pro Tem, drew a portrait of himself in a recent interview with Los Angeles Times columnist George Skelton.

It wasn't a pretty picture. De León came off as arrogant and someone far more interested in taking care of people in his home district than attending to the needs of all Californians.

De León also showed himself to be 100% ignorant about the Central Valley. Our region is one with many challenges, but it's the state's fastest-growing area — one that 9 million Californians will call home by 2040, according to the state Department of Finance.

Understand: One of Sen. de León's stated priorities is moving the start of California's \$68 billion high

Why?

Here's a sampling of what de León told Skelton:

-- "I don't think it makes sense to lay down track in the middle of nowhere. It's illogical. No one lives out there in the tumbleweeds."

-- "We're putting hard hats to work. When people see the healthful impact this is having and all the hard hats constructing, their minds may change about high-speed rail. But out in the Central Valley, where the train's not going anywhere, no one will see the construction jobs."

-- "Every day the Metro comes in, the Amtrak comes in and they idle their engines for hours, spewing poisonous toxins — all that crap — into the air. That increases asthma rates, particularly of poor children who live in the community. That's in my district, OK?"

No one deserves to breathe unhealthy air — including Central Valley residents who put up with some of the nation's worst air pollution. Not that de León apparently cares about the 6.5 million of us living out in the tumbleweeds of a region that covers 22,500 square miles and includes two of California's largest metropolitan areas, Sacramento and Fresno. His mission is to bring the pork home for his folks.

Really, de León needs to go back to school. We doubt that he can locate the Central Valley on a map. Odds are, he doesn't realize that Sacramento — our state capital — is part of the Central Valley.

The fact is, high-speed rail systems are built from the center out. The Central Valley's flat terrain is best for testing trains at high speeds, and land-acquisition costs are lower than in urban areas. Gov. Jerry Brown recognizes these facts. The federal government recognizes them, too, and is providing \$3.3 billion to start high-speed rail here.

Moreover, Central Valley residents need jobs. That's right, Sen. de León, some of our workers even wear hard hats.

The senator also said, "We're going to have to save the governor from himself on high-speed rail" by moving the project's start to Los Angeles and San Francisco.

We suggest that de León focus instead on educating himself about the entire state before he becomes the Senate leader in October. As of now, it's plain as day that he's not ready for prime time.

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