

Andy Vidak: Beware of green-energy prophets and promises

By Andy Vidak

The leader of the state Senate, Kevin de León, got one thing right in his commentary, “Valley is poised for green-energy economic boom” March 8 in the Bee: the Valley’s poverty has been “aggravated by” and “overlooked” in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., for years.

Senate President Pro Tem de León, a very liberal Democrat senator from Los Angeles, is one of those folks who has visited the Valley a few times over the last year and now thinks that he is an expert on what ails the Valley.

It’s clear that the coastal elite do not fully grasp the real human suffering experienced by so many in our Valley, and what’s needed to stop the pain, and instead, create a real economic boom.

Rather than radical environmental policies that put fish above families, the folks in the Valley need a reliable and clean source of water; they need real jobs; they need roads that aren’t deteriorating; and they need access to health care in rural and disadvantaged communities.

Water is the lifeblood of our Valley. It is the engine of our economy. Water is the reason Fresno County is one of the largest agricultural counties — top three — in the United States, with an estimated economic benefit of \$6.6 billion a year.

The San Joaquin River Restoration project, aimed at saving a ghost fish that has long since gone, is one example of an extreme environmental policy that is causing human suffering in our Valley.

Flushing millions of gallons of precious water out to the ocean, instead of storing it and sending it to parched communities up and down the Valley, defies common sense. Many disadvantaged communities are taking showers in parking lots from water trucked in and are forced to buy bottled water because they continue to lack access to clean drinking water.

Water and jobs are tightly connected in the Valley. The lack of water and the onus of additional government regulations have caused unemployment rates in some areas of western Fresno County to be double or triple the statewide rate.

Farmworkers, farmers and families in the Valley have been waiting decades for increased water storage. We know that additional water storage will help us save and build real jobs here — unlike the so-called “green economy,”

Another example of radical environmental policy is a hidden gas tax that an unelected board of Sacramento bureaucrats created to raise billions to pay for pet projects like high-speed rail. This boondoggle, intended for coastal elites to get from one big city to another, is destroying businesses, farms, families and lives in the Valley.

For years, extreme environmentalists have worked to divert money that we pay in gas taxes and vehicle registration fees from road construction to pet mass-transit projects that only benefit urban cities.

Many of my constituents live in rural communities that do not have access to medical care. This lack of medical care was made worse when Gov. Brown and a majority of the Legislature, including Sen. de León, voted to cut provider rates by 10%, further discouraging doctors to set up shop in low-income communities. We need to reverse this cut and entice doctors and health-care providers to invest in our rural communities.

Sen. de León’s radical environmental agenda will only hurt the people who can least afford it by increasing the cost of gasoline, electricity and other necessities. Gasoline and electricity are not luxuries for impoverished families in the

Valley who are struggling to survive.

Beware of green-energy prophets — they make a lot of false promises that are currently devastating and will continue to hurt our Valley.

State Sen. Andy Vidak represents the 14th District, which includes all of Kings County and portions of Fresno, Kern and Tulare counties.