SCC opts to study before deciding union issue

By Nada Behziz
DAILY REPUBLIC

ROCKVILLE — Solano Community College is about to plunge headfirst into a simmering national political tug-of-war over whether to give pro-labor union contractors a leg up on public construction projects.

At issue is who will get the lucrative $124.5 million contract that will bring new college facilities to Vallejo and Vacaville and revamp the 30-year-old campus in Rockville.

The Project Labor Agreement, which is being pushed by local unions and would force contractors to hire workers through unions, are the bane of conservative groups such as the Associated Builders and Contractors.

Some called it a blatant attempt to curry political support from organized labor.

Union supporters say the agreement would assure the most skilled, safe and efficient workforce available for a project passed by more than 55 percent of taxpayers in November 2002.

Measure G, which minimally received the required 50 percent vote, would be paid through property taxes from Solano County Homeowners — $18 for each $100,000 of assessed value on the home.

Measure G will upgrade the campus's infrastructure, build a new student learning center and resources building, and establish a new track complex and golf driving range, among other things.

But officials from the ABC, which represents nonunion contractors, says they are discriminatory and increase construction costs by limiting competition.

"Eight out of 10 workers wake up and decide to go to work and not be in a union," said Eric Christen, executive director of the Coalition for Fair Employment in Construction. "The agreement would exclude those workers and control the workers who do go with the project."

Union backers say, however, that everyone, union and nonunion workers alike, will have the chance to bid on the project. The only catch: They have to pay union dues and abide by union laws and regulations.

SCC's governing board decided to research the topic further and return to their Sept. 16 meeting with a prospective agreement and then take a vote.

"The board needs to decide what is the best way to get the biggest bang for their buck," said Sandra Benson, an attorney representing the union. "PLA's will bring coordination to a multitude of projects."

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SCC trustees OK contract

By Tanya Mannes/Reporter Staff

The first step toward building a Vacaville college center and other projects was taken Wednesday, as the Solano Community College governing board approved a $5 million contract with a construction manager to handle Measure G projects.

At the same meeting, the board opted to postpone a controversial decision on whether to favor unions in awarding contracts for Measure G construction.

The managing contract is with Phoenix, Ariz.-based Kitchell Capital Expenditure Managers, Inc. The vote was 6-0, with Trustee Philip McCaffrey dissenting.

"I chose to abstain because there were some questions I had about the negotiations between the college and both of the top firms," McCaffrey said Thursday. He could not elaborate due to confidentiality issues, he said.

Voters approved Measure G in 2002. Proceeds from the bond measure will infuse $124.5 million into the local college system for new facilities and upgrades to the 30-year-old campus infrastructure.

In addition to facilities on the main Suisun Valley Road campus, the funds will pay for campuses to replace the existing facilities in Vallejo and Vacaville.

The governing board also considered a proposal that would require contractors to sign a "project labor agreement" with unions in order to work on Measure G projects.

Vallejo Unified School District entered into such an agreement for its facilities bond, and Solano County entered into a labor agreement for its new county government center in Fairfield.

Local labor unions asked the board to approve the agreement.

Taking the opposite stance was the Coalition for Fair Employment in Construction, which said an agreement would cut competition and raise costs, according to Eric Christen, executive director of the statewide coalition.

"A project labor agreement is a bad decision for everybody, especially the taxpayer," he said. "You're going to get hundreds of contractors not wanting to bid on the projects because they don't want to lose control of their workforce and they don't want workers to lose control of their money."

"We heard from a number of sides and a number of speakers, mostly favoring the project labor agreement," said Trustee Denis Honeychurch on Thursday. "The consensus among trustees was that we wanted to hear a report Sept. 17."

No vote is scheduled on such an agreement, he said.

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Solano's educational PLA battle

The latest front in the war over Project Labor Agreements is in Fairfield. The spoils: $124.5 million in Solano Community College bond funds approved – barely – by voters. Eric Christen, head of the Coalition for Fair Employment in Construction, says contractors would have campaigned against the bond and probably could have defeated it last November if they had known the college district would tie the money to a PLA. Union-supported PLAs commit workers to a no-strike pledge and require contractors to pay union-scale wages and comply with other union-backed provisions. Organized labor is lobbying the college district to slap a PLA on Measure G money, which is earmarked for upgrading and building college facilities in Vacaville and Vallejo. This won't be Solano's first PLA battle. The county imposed a PLA two years ago on the construction of a new administration building, Genetech Inc. adopted a PLA for its Vacaville facility and the Vallejo school district approved a PLA in 2001 for projects using Measure A funds. On the flip side, the Fairfield-Suisun school district rejected PLAs in 2001. The fight is sure to heat up in the wake of a Solano Community College District board workshop last week to discuss the pros and cons of PLAs.
September 18, 2003

NEWS:
- Tragic day on I-80
- Data on union labor for SCC hits delay

SPORTS:
- Wildcats drive past Bulldogs
- Vaca blanks Wood in tennis showdown

Tragic day on I-80
Wrong-way van leaves two dead

By Kimberly K. FulReporter Staff

Two women were killed and a California Highway Patrol officer severely injured Wednesday morning in two separate traffic accidents that occurred within 20 minutes of each other on westbound Interstate 80.

Rocklin resident Lorena Hernandez, 48, and Vacaville resident Amanda D. Chatigny, 26, the daughter of a CHP dispatcher, both died shortly after 7 a.m. in a two-car crash in Fairfield that expanded to include three other vehicles. Problems began on eastbound I-80 then crossed over into the westbound lanes where the collisions occurred, snarling traffic back to the Lagoon Valley exit in Vacaville for several hours.

Motorcycle Officer Michael Terry, 36, a five-year department veteran who works out of the San Francisco branch of CHP's Golden Gate Division, suffered major injuries to his right shoulder area, Sgt. Rosalina Jabay said. He apparently crashed into a van just east of Mace Boulevard in Davis shortly before 7:30 a.m. Terry was transported to the University of California, Davis, Medical Center in Sacramento, where he underwent surgery, she said. He was listed in critical condition at press time.

The tragic events began around 7 a.m. and snowballed.

At 7:05 a.m., a man driving east on I-80 at Red Top Road near Vallejo called 911 from his cellphone to report that he was tracking a reckless driver. A gold-colored Toyota Sienna LE was driving recklessly, he told the dispatcher, traveling at speeds of 50-80 mph and swerving across all lanes.

Having given the minivan's license plate number to the dispatcher, the man then backed off from his close surveillance, Officer Chuck Monroe said.

Then, the worst happened.

"About a minute later, as he crested the rise at West Texas Street, he saw the van had crashed and stopped to give a statement," Monroe said. Other witnesses also pulled over.

What happened was a nightmare, the cause still a mystery.
Monroe said three witnesses - two of them off-duty correctional officers - saw the minivan, driven by Hernandez, crisscrossing the eastbound lanes.

"It was like she was lurching," he said. As she passed the Travis Boulevard exit, Hernandez' minivan suddenly flew into the center divider, struck a wood post and jumped the cable barrier attached to the post, Monroe said.

Hernandez' vehicle then entered the westbound lanes and immediately smashed head-on into a green Chrysler Sebring driven by Chatigny. Both cars spun out and somehow involved three other vehicles in the accident. Both women are believed to have died instantly.

A white Dodge Dakota reportedly smacked into the minivan and came to rest in the middle lanes. The driver, 45-year-old Robert Molina of Davis, suffered cuts to his face and was treated at NorthBay Medical Center.

A red Toyota Corolla - driven by 19-year-old Clifton Huebner of Vacaville, and a cream-colored Toyota pickup - driven by 26-year-old Trevor Agnitsch of Fairfield, both struck or were hit by other vehicles. Neither driver was injured. The Corolla ended up in a fast lane and the Toyota on the shoulder.

The minivan ended up in the fast lane, the Sebring at an angle, half in the slow lane and half in the shoulder.

Shattered glass, fragments of car parts, plant debris and personal belongings were scattered for about 500 feet along the roadway. And children and adults gawked at the frightening scene from along the adjacent fence line.

Monroe said there was no evidence of intoxication and the crashes remain under investigation. Autopsies are scheduled to be performed today.

Officials had few details regarding Michael Terry's crash, reported at 7:26 a.m. All that's known is that the Sacramento resident was headed to work on his motorcycle and slid into a van.

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**Data on union labor for SCC hits delay**

*By Tanya Mannes/Reporter Staff*

Solano Community College will have to wait longer for a report on how union labor has been used in construction projects by local public agencies, the college's governing board learned Wednesday.

The report had been commissioned two weeks ago by trustees who said they needed more information before entering into a "project labor agreement" that would favor unions in awarding contracts for Measure G construction.

But on Wednesday, the Measure G project manager told the board that 45 more days are needed to conduct interviews with officials from the Vallejo Unified School District and Solano County, both of which have used project labor agreements.

The report will be presented at the Nov. 5 board meeting, the day after the election. Trustees will be asked at the meeting whether to authorize Kitchell, the firm hired as project manager, to negotiate with the unions.

Trustees asked pointed questions of Mark Newton, a Kitchell representative.

"My understanding is that Kitchell is neutral (on the issue of union labor agreements)," said trustee Denis Honeychurch.
Newton confirmed that some, but not all, of Kitchell’s clients have project labor agreements.

"We probably won’t present a recommendation to the board (on whether to adopt the agreement)," he said. "We feel it’s a district decision that needs to be made by the board."

Voters approved Measure G in November 2002; the proceeds will infuse $124.5 million into the local college system for new facilities and upgrades to the 30-year-old campus infrastructure.

The funds will pay for campuses to replace the existing facilities in Vallejo and Vacaville in addition to facilities on the main Suisun campus.

Unions say a project labor agreement guarantees a work force made up of local workers who have received training and completed apprenticeships. Critics say the agreements hurt competition and increase costs.

Non-union employees must pay union dues as a condition of employment, among other conditions under such an agreement.

Dan Broadwater, a union representative, asked the board to visit training centers for local unions representing electricians, plumbers and steamfitters, iron workers and carpenters.

"This is an invitation for any of you to come out and see our training facilities," said Broadwater, the president of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union No.180.

He said the electrical workers’ training budget was $773,000 this year alone.

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**SPORTS:**

**Wildcats drive past Bulldogs**

*By Reporter Sports Staff*

Desirae Zine was visibly frustrated as she walked off the ninth green at Cypress Lakes Golf Course on Wednesday.

And she still took medalist honors by 11 shots.

Zine shot 44 as the Will C. Wood High School girls golf team steamed past crosstown rival Vacaville 285-348 in a Monticello Empire League match.

It’s the first of three meetings between the two schools this year.

"(Tuesday) I felt that I had a bad day, so on my home course I thought I would do better," said Zine, who shot a 39 at Davis Municipal Golf Course on Tuesday. "I’m fine. I love to play golf. It’s the only sport for me."

Zine said most of her problems came on the greens as she had trouble adjusting from the greens at Davis Muni to those at Cypress Lakes. She felt the greens at Davis were much quicker and therefore was leaving a number of putts on Wednesday short.