



Obama — Commie corporate dupe

By Jeff Wieler

Got your attention, didn't I?

If you're following the health care debate, you've probably seen President Obama accused by conservatives of wanting to socialize 1/7th of the U.S. economy, and accused by liberals of selling out to corporate interests by abandoning "Single Payer." And no doubt somebody out there is accusing him of trying to be in the middle of the road, where you normally find only yellow stripes and dead squirrels.

There's a terrible, destructive bitterness in national politics. It's not enough to simply disagree. Each side is convinced they're righteous and pure. And when you're righteous and pure and others dare to disagree, it's clear that they're either incredibly stupid or, if they're not actually spawn of the Devil, they've clearly sold out to the forces of darkness. And unfortunately the same Manichaeon tone is creeping into Piedmont politics.

I recall that five or six years ago, Perry Kennan, an affable Kiwi living up on Abbott Way, came to the City Council to complain about Blair Park, the strip of unused city-owned land on the south side of Moraga Avenue. Perry pointed out that Moraga was a main entrance to Piedmont, but was derelict and littered with trash and debris. Not unreasonably, he wanted something done. Four years ago, the Council budgeted \$50,000 to study potential improvements, and in 2007, appropriated \$100,000 more. Two years ago, another \$70,000 was thrown into the pot.

Around the same time, the CIP Committee was considering whether it might make sense to install artificial turf and lights further down Moraga, at Coaches Field, and appropriated \$750,000. Not nearly enough to pay for the entire project, but more than enough for prelimi-

nary studies and to start saving for the work.

Sports enthusiasts also got into the act. They wanted to see Blair Park used for sports fields, an idea that's been rattling around Piedmont for 20-odd years. They first put \$45,000 of private money on the table for a feasibility study, then \$165,000 more to develop a conceptual study of what "sports fields" might mean. By mid-2008, there was almost \$1.2 million in the pot,

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and in December the Council decided to combine all the ideas into one big study. After all, if traffic, for example, is a potential problem, it makes sense to conduct a traffic study including both Blair Park and Coaches Field. So far \$411,000 has been spent on everything, mostly from private funds, with most of the City's money going to study lighting and turf at Coaches Field.

It should be no surprise that people living near proposed projects would have concerns, and this led to the formation of a group called "Friends of Moraga Canyon." I think it's safe to say that the conceptual sports field study, with its elevator, bridge, and retaining wall, didn't meet with their approval. They want the project stopped.

Last week the Council had to decide whether to spend \$26,200 to expand the scope of an existing Environmental Impact Report. California now requires consideration of a project's effects on Global Climate Change. Opponents of the project had raised concern over potential noise and air quality impacts,

see *PIEDMONTAGE* on page 5

Piedmontage-

Continued from page 3

and stated that wildlife fleeing from any construction might transmit diseases into Piedmont.

The sports field group had agreed to contribute the \$26,200. The "Friends" group opposed accepting the money or completing the EIR.

My long-standing, publicly expressed opinion is that the EIR is only the very first step in what will be a very long process. I don't know if the conceptual sports field design works or if it needs to be scaled back, or if private money can be raised for the project (the City sure doesn't have the funding), or even if a sports field is the "highest and best use."

Maybe a single sports field makes sense, maybe senior housing, maybe a dog park. Who knows? But the EIR will give us valuable information and help us make decisions. When we can get information with

private funds, not public monies, I think it makes sense.

Information is good, especially when it's free.

And now a mea culpa: I asked a speaker for her address. She felt my request was an accusation of "NIM-BY-ism." Years ago, in my previous Council stint, speakers were always asked to state their name and address, but apparently it's no longer required.

I regret if my question was perceived as offensive, but I thought it might provide pertinent information. There's a long road ahead before any decisions are made, and it will be a lot easier for everybody if we all assume good intentions on everybody's part, even when we disagree.

Jeff Wieler was recently elected to the Piedmont City Council. He welcomes your questions and comments. He can be reached by e-mail (JSWieler@Yahoo.com) or by phone at 428-1648.