



# Senator Sheila Kuehl

23<sup>rd</sup> District Newsletter • April 2006

## The Defeat of Legislation to Clean Up the Rocketdyne Test Site

*The Second of Four Articles*  
by Laura Plotkin

The first article set out the history of the meltdown and contamination of the Rocketdyne test site. This article chronicles attempts to require cleanup at the site.

Very quickly after the George W. Bush Administration took office, longstanding commitments made by the federal government to thoroughly clean up the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL) were summarily reversed. The site had become extensively contaminated with radioactive materials and toxic chemicals during decades of work undertaken for various federal agencies such as the Atomic Energy Commission, and repeated promises had been made to the local community and elected officials that the site would be thoroughly remediated up to

*Children could end up living on top of strontium-90 and cesium-137 that everyone knew was there from the meltdown.*

United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards. Additionally, EPA had repeatedly assured us that they would conduct a thorough radiation survey of the site to pinpoint the exact locations of contamination that needed to be cleaned up.

Suddenly, all those commitments were reversed. The Department of Energy (DOE) announced they would leave in place 98% of the radioactively contaminated soil and, despite this, that they would release the site for unrestricted residential use. We were appalled at the possible results: children could end up living on top of strontium-90 and cesium-137 that everyone knew was there from the meltdown. The DOE also announced that EPA would not be conducting a radiation survey. EPA, helpless to intervene since authority over the site had been given to the Federal Department of Energy, was left only to criticize the decisions,

saying that, under those circumstances, the site would be completely unsafe for housing and barely safe for day hikes.

Senator Kuehl tried repeatedly to find a state law resolution to these problems. In 2001 she introduced SB 243, which would have required all former reactor sites in the state to be cleaned up to the most protective EPA standards and all radioactive waste to be disposed of in licensed radioactive waste disposal facilities. This latter provision was in response to revelations that Rocketdyne had been dumping radioactive debris from decommissioning old reactor buildings at SSFL in local municipal landfills, such as Bradley landfill in the North San Fernando Valley. They had also sold radioactive scrap from the reactors to a metal recycler in San Pedro, and there was a great danger that the radioactive metals would end up in the consumer metal supply. There was heavy and sustained lobbying against the bill by the Boeing Company as well as labor unions trying to curry favor with Boeing. The bill failed.

The next year, she introduced SB 2444, which narrowed the previous year's efforts in order to focus simply on cleanup standards and monitoring. During the course of the legislative ses-

*(ROCKETDYNE continued on page 5)*

### IN • THIS • ISSUE

- 2 Whatever Happened to the Infrastructure Bond?
- 3 Third Community Meeting on Gang Violence
- 3 Oxnard Employment Training Panel Workshop
- 4 Transportation Bills a Priority for the 23rd Senate District
- 6 California Health Insurance Reliability Act (SB 840) Update
- 7 The Role of a Chief of Staff

(ROCKETDYNE continued from page 1)

sion, the bill was narrowed further, to focus just on cleaning up and monitoring only of the Rocketdyne site. The bill would have required cleanup of SSFL to the California Department of Health Services' own standard for cleaning up military bases. Again, after heavy lobbying

---

*Why should such a "no brainer" of a concept – that you don't let children live or play on a nuclear meltdown site until it has been cleaned up to standards EPA says are safe – have had such a tough time getting through the Assembly? Boeing.*

---

against, this bill failed in the Assembly, garnering 31 aye votes and 32 noes, with the rest of the Assembly not voting (41 votes are needed to pass bills in the Assembly).

In 2003, Senator Kuehl moved SB 208, which would require SSFL to be cleaned up to EPA's Superfund standards and monitored pursuant to EPA's proposed survey, as previously promised. The bill was put "on suspense"

in the Appropriations Committee, meaning it couldn't move forward that year.

In 2004, the effort continued with SB 1456, which would simply have required SSFL to be cleaned up to EPA's Superfund standards, as had long been promised. Again, having passed the Senate, as did the previous bills, the bill died in the Assembly with 30 aye votes and 39 noes, with 11 abstentions.

Why should such a "no brainer" of a concept – that you don't let children live or play on a nuclear meltdown site until it has been cleaned up

to standards EPA says are safe – have had such a tough time getting through the Assembly? Boeing.

Emily Churg, then an undergraduate at UC Santa Cruz and now a law student at UC Davis, decided to test an hypothesis that campaign contributions by Boeing may have played a role. She tracked the average donation by Boeing to the members of the Assembly who had voted for SB 1456 against those who had voted against it and those who had abstained. (Remember that an abstention has the same effect as a "no" vote, as a majority of the total membership, not simply the number of those voting, is required for a bill to pass).

Churg found that Boeing had given an average of \$1636 to each Assemblymember who abstained on SB 1456 and \$1354 to each who had voted against it. By contrast, those who voted for SB 1456 received an average of \$425. In other words, Boeing had given 3-4 times as much money to those who had acted to kill the bill than those who supported it.

Naturally, no Assemblymember makes a decision purely based on contributions, but, where there is no deeper principle, and a lack of experience due to term limits, the arguments of those who seem supportive can often prevail. "Scientists" are brought to contradict testimony at hearings. Lobbyists marshal workers who say their jobs are threatened if Boeing is not allowed to sell the site. In installment three, the work continues.

*Laura Plotkin is Senator Kuehl's District Director.*

---

(TRANSPORTATION continued from page 4)

Marvin Braude was a visionary and steadfast public servant who represented the Westside on the LA City Council from 1965 to 1997. He was well known for his determined and persistent work as a public servant, perhaps best illustrated by his 20-year battle for smoking . in public places. His efforts culminated in 1993 when the LA City Council passed a ban on smoking in the City's 7,000 restaurants, making Los Angeles the largest city in the nation to take such a step.

But Marvin Braude will most fondly be remembered for his dedication to protecting open space and parks. When he was first elected to the LA City Council, the fate of the Santa Monica Mountains was in doubt with much of the land zoned for development. Braude advocated for tighter zoning laws that resulted in a reduction in the size of development; and his advocacy was

crucial to the many acquisitions in the Santa Monica Mountains that today make the area a model for preservation in the middle of a large urban area. Braude's work with former Congressman Anthony Beilenson, and others, culminated in the creation of the Santa Monica National Recreation Area.

Braude was also an avid cyclist, and was frequently seen bicycling to the beach with his wife, Marjorie, from their home in Brentwood. In the early 70s, he spearheaded an effort to build a bike path along a well traveled part of Venice Beach. In 1989, the final 1.2 mile strip in the City of Santa Monica was completed. If Senator Kuehl is successful, in 2007, the very popular 22.3 mile long beach bike path will officially be named and eventually be known as the Marvin Braude Bikeway.