

Cemex lobbying trip said to be a success

City -- Santa Clarita officials offer support to mine-halting legislation in Washington

Natalie Everett, Santa Clarita Signal, 6-21-10

A delegation of Santa Clarita city officials who traveled to Washington, D.C., last week to lobby against the proposed Cemex mine report it's optimistic about the efforts.

"All in all, I consider our trip successful to the city and for the citizens," said Councilman Bob Kellar, who with other city officials made the lobbying trip.

"As I assess the trip and where we are today compared to times past, I'm extremely optimistic that we're going to be successful."

Mayor Laurene Weste, Kellar, Assistant City Manager Ken Striplin and Intergovernmental Relations Officer Mike Murphy flew to Washington last Monday and returned Thursday night.

They lobbied legislators and the Bureau of Land Management in support of legislation — introduced into both the House and the Senate by Republican Congressman Howard "Buck" McKeon and Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif. — in support of an agreement that would end Cemex Inc.'s proposal for a massive mine in Soledad Canyon.

The bills could resolve a 20-year-old mining dispute between the city of Santa Clarita and Cemex.

Among the legislators the group met with was Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

"Some of her concerns have perhaps been answered," Kellar said. "We have not gotten a statement of absolute support, but she clearly feels better."

Weste said she hoped to get the legislation passed by the end of the year.

"Face-to-face meetings with the elected officials are the critical meetings that allow us to (make our case)," Weste said.

The fight goes back to 1990, when the Bureau of Land Management awarded Cemex two consecutive 10-year contracts to extract 56 million tons of sand and gravel from a site in Soledad Canyon, north of Canyon Country. The city, however, strongly opposed Cemex's mining proposal.

The legislation would require the Secretary of the Interior to cancel Cemex's mining contracts in Soledad Canyon and prohibit future mining at the site.

The Bureau of Land Management would compensate Cemex for its canceled contracts with earnings from land sales near Victorville — an agreement that Victorville city officials have endorsed.