

Wildfire kills five firefighters

POPPET FLAT, Calif. (AP) — Dozens of people displaced by a wind-driven wildfire packed into a local RV park for an emotional meeting where law enforcement officials vowed to catch those responsible for starting the blaze that killed five firefighters.

Residents of Twin Pines and Poppet Flat gave a standing ovation during the gathering Wednesday night after a U.S. Forest Service employee broke down while announcing the firefighters' funerals.

"This is a very sad and difficult time for all of us. We can't express how much your support and love means to us," said Gabriel Garcia, district ranger for the San Bernardino National Forest, as he fought back tears.

Officials declined to talk about the ongoing arson investigation, other than to say it was "evolving." They assured residents they were aggressively pursuing leads.



JAN KATZACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

Jeannie Brown and Teresa Zajac painted a "Harvest Moon" scene on the front window of a downtown business in Hoxie. As part of "moon folklore," the naming of moons dates back prior to the introduction of calendars. Consequently, 12 moons were identified: The Wolf Moon, the Snow Moon, the Worm Moon, the Pink Moon, the Flower Moon, the Strawberry Moon, the Buck Moon, the Sturgeon Moon, the Harvest Moon, the Hunter's Moon, the Beaver Moon, and the Cold Moon. Although the moons were all the same, the naming allowed people to keep track of time, according to historical sources.

U.S. pesticide stockpile under scrutiny at world ozone meeting

Associated Press
The Bush administration is seeking world permission to produce thousands of tons of a pesticide that an international treaty banned nearly two years ago, even though U.S. companies already have assembled huge stockpiles of the chemical.

Methyl bromide has been used for decades by farmers to help grow plump, sweet strawberries, robust peppers and other crops, but it also depletes the Earth's protective ozone. The United States and other countries signed a 1987 treaty promising to end its use by 2005.

Americans failed to meet the Montreal Protocol deadline and since have been getting annual exemptions allowing methyl bromide's continued use on certain crops in specific states. Other nations have sought far smaller exemptions.

The latest exemption requests are being considered this week at an international meeting in New Delhi, India.

Though smaller than prior years, the amount of methyl bromide the United States wants approved for 2008 concerns some allies, especially given the stockpiles.

The U.S. request "is certainly undermining the spirit of the Montreal Protocol and setting a bad example for other countries, especially developing countries, and their aspirations to comply with the ban," Swedish delegate Husamuddin Ahmadzai said. "Everybody is concerned with the issue."

This year marks the first time

other nations, trying to curtail new methyl bromide production, have seen the size of the U.S. stockpile.

The administration says the inventory is needed to ease growers' adjustment to the methyl bromide phase-out that was ordered 14 years ago. Importantly, they say, both stockpiles and production are steadily declining.

Each year, countries seek treaty exemptions for so-called critical needs. U.S. officials want allocations for growers of tomatoes, strawberries, peppers and other crops who mostly use the potent chemical to destroy pests before planting. The restrictions have pushed many farmers to switch to other pesticides, but the United States says the substitutes don't work in all cases.

Negotiators met behind closed doors Thursday to tackle exemptions for 2008. Dissension emerged in a technical committee report that recommended substantially paring the U.S. request for nearly 7,100 tons, an amount greater than the other nations' combined.

The Bush administration says the stockpiles existed before the 2005 ban and thus are not subject to the same restrictions as newly produced methyl bromide.

"The U.S. position is that we are appropriately managing the strategic reserve," said Drusilla Hufford, director of the Environmental Protection Agency's stratospheric protection division. "We've drawn it down every year."

She said the United States has spent \$150 million on alternative pesticides and has achieved a 75

percent reduction from 1991 methyl bromide levels.

"There's a lot going on but in order to continue the progress so you don't have supply shocks or sudden unanticipated changes in the market, we found in the past that it is useful and helpful to the cause of ozone protection to have that reserve," she said.

Environmental advocates say the stockpiles far surpass what is needed for a market cushion. They say the U.S. approach undercuts the goal of limiting methyl bromide because stockpiles can be used to meet demands that the treaty has rejected.

"Imagine if a country used this approach for narcotics. It would be as though we strictly controlled doctors' and patients' access to morphine for essential medical needs, like pain relief, but let anyone else take as much as they want from the storeroom," said David Doniger, climate policy director of the Natural Resources Defense Council. In New Delhi, he urged treaty countries to block further U.S. production.

Former EPA Administrator William Reilly said the current U.S. stance, 14 years after methyl bromide was added to the treaty's target list, undercuts world efforts to protect the Earth's ozone.

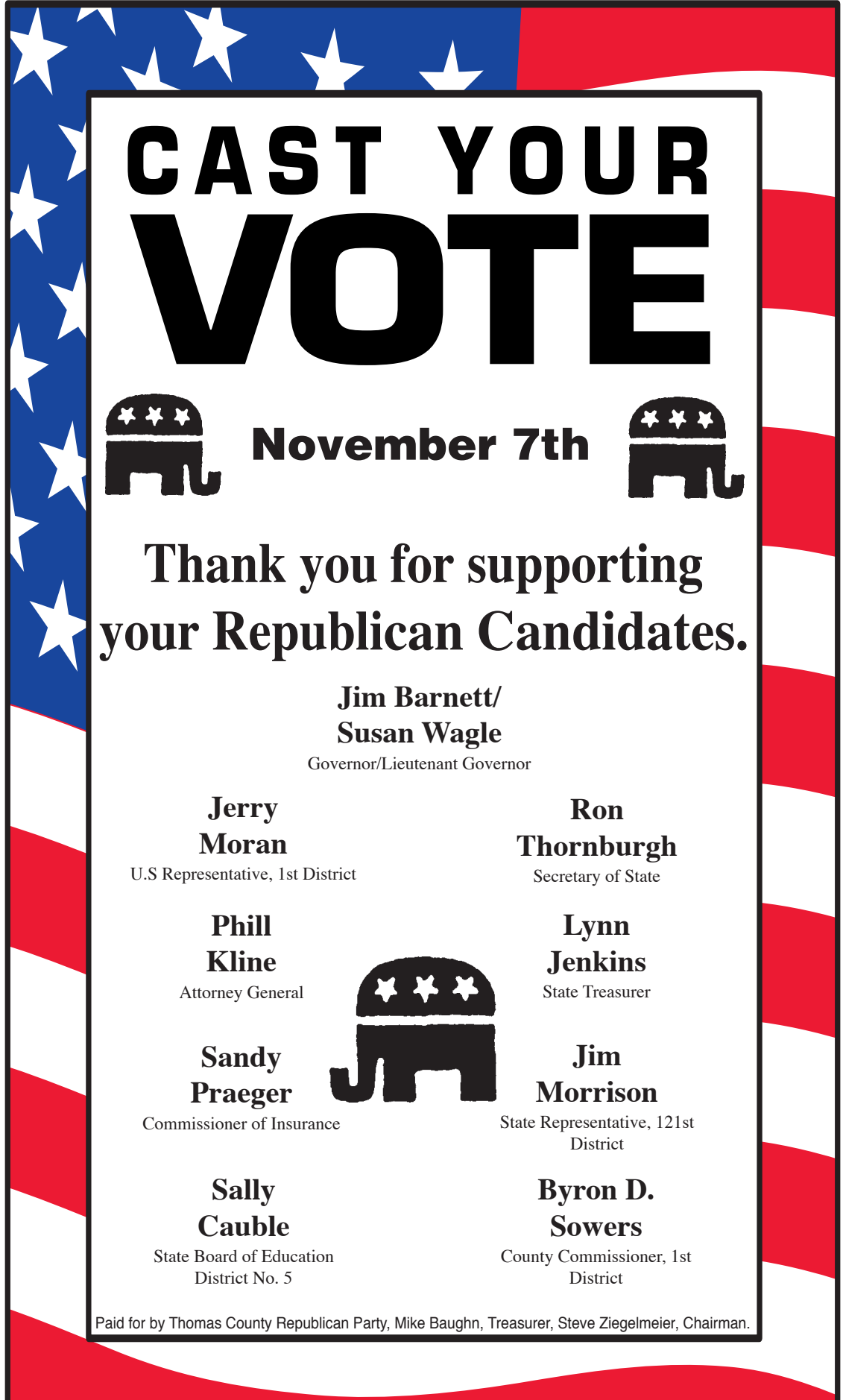
"The point of the Montreal Protocol was to get us out of ozone depleters and provide a certain transition, with some small exemptions," he said. "We provided for that, but a 14-year transition is a little hard to justify for mainline uses."

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