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The Desert Sun

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Massive area solar plant gets OK

Officials: Facility planned near Blythe will help diversify economy, create jobs

BY K KAUFFMANN
The Desert Sun

Construction of the largest solar project ever planned on U.S. public lands soon could be under way east of the Coachella

Valley, triggering what area officials hope will be a chain reaction of jobs and clean energy production that will help diversify the region's flagging economy. U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken

Salazar announced Monday the final approval of Solar Millennium's 1,000-megawatt solar thermal plant that is scheduled to break ground by the end of the year.

About 8 miles west of Blythe, the project will generate enough electricity to power between 300,000 and 750,000 homes, he said. It also will create more than 1,000 construction jobs and

about 295 permanent positions once complete.

"These are jobs that can't be sent overseas or outsourced," Salazar said during a telephone news conference Monday.

The Blythe project is the first of four fast-track solar projects to finish a complex permitting process that will create hundreds of jobs east of the valley and

generate thousands of megawatts of solar power on about 200,000 acres of public land stretching from Joshua Tree National Park to Blythe. The area is referred to as the Riverside East solar zone.

All four projects have had to complete the approval process by the end of the year in order to qualify for billions of dollars in federal stimulus funds.

Please see SOLAR, A8

ELECTION 2010 GOVERNOR'S RACE



Meg Whitman, Republican candidate for California governor and former eBay CEO, shakes hands with Sandra Marley, 66, (at right) and her husband Ronald Marley, 80, during a campaign visit on Monday to Sun City Shadow Hills in Indio.

Whitman says she will bring change

But recent poll shows Democrat Jerry Brown ahead

BY NICOLE C. BRAMBILA
The Desert Sun

Republican gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman made a stop at Sun City Shadow Hills in Indio on Monday, telling roughly 200 people that she represents the only hope California has for change.

The former eBay CEO walked casually around an art class in the clubhouse of the senior community, chatting with students and posing for photos.

"Everyone has seen me on TV and on the Internet so, this is great to shake hands," Whitman said after 30 minutes of pressing hands and smiling for cell phone cameras.

Whitman hit on familiar themes in brief remarks to supporters, describing the race against Democrat Jerry Brown as "a choice between a career politician and a career problem solver," a line she uses in most campaign stops.

"If you're looking for a change, vote for me," she said. "If you're OK and you're happy with

How will you vote?

For whom will you vote for California governor? Tell us at mydesert.com

how California works, then vote for my opponent."

Geoff Toner, who runs the creative arts class, chatted with Whitman for several minutes and said he was impressed.

"I'm for less government, lower taxes and getting away from the philosophy of redistribution of wealth," Toner said. "The people we

Please see WHITMAN, A8

Salaries for city, county employees now online

Desert Hot Springs only valley city to fail to report

BY NICOLE C. BRAMBILA
The Desert Sun

The state controller's office on Monday launched a new website listing salary and pension benefits for city and county employees across California.

The website lists salaries for more than 594,000 city and county employees, including municipal employees in the Coachella Valley.

The reporting requirement was ordered by State Controller John Chiang in August after the Bell salary scandal, in which public officials are accused of enriching themselves with exorbitant salaries hidden from public view.

"The absence of transparency and accountability invites corruption, self-dealing, and the abuse of public funds," Chiang said in a news release. By Dec. 13, 828 transit, waste disposal, fire and police protection special districts will be required to post salaries.

The Local Government Compensation Reporting website includes the salary ranges and wages paid, pension costs and employer health care payments. The website is also supposed to show which employees hold multiple positions.

The site does not list workers by name but by position. In most cases, it lists only salary minimums and maximums for specific positions, meaning it's impossible to match an exact salary to an individual.

Roughly 83 percent of cities and counties complied with the new reporting requirements, according to the controller's office.

In the Coachella Valley, only Desert Hot Springs was among the 57 cities and nine counties statewide that did not file salary reports. The city could be fined if the reports are not forthcoming.

Desert Hot Springs officials did not return phone calls seeking comment on Monday.

Find Coachella Valley and Riverside County employee salaries online at <http://lgr.scc.ca.gov>.

'Hiccup girl' charged with murder in Fla.

A teenage girl who became famous after hiccupping uncontrollably for weeks has been charged with luring a man to a house where he was robbed and fatally shot.

Jennifer Moe, 19, of St. Petersburg and two others are charged with first-degree murder. A4



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Jennifer Moe, 19, of St. Petersburg, Fla., is charged in the killing of a man during a robbery.



CHRIS O'HARA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Poll: GOP voters far more fired up

One week before Election Day, Democrats face a record-setting "enthusiasm gap" that positions energized Republicans to score sweeping victories in next week's congressional elections, a USA Today/Gallup Poll finds. A4



AL SEIB THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Former Bell City Manager Robert Rizzo appears for arraignment on corruption charges in Los Angeles Superior Court Thursday.

INTODAY'S PAPER

Campaign controversy

A campaign muller sort by Palm Desert Mayor Cindy Finley has drawn a second complaint from a candidate. B1

Advice	B11	Movies	B9
Bridge	B11	Obituaries	B6
Comics	B10	Opinion	B4
Crossword	B11	Sudoku	B9
Entertainment	B8	TV	B9
Lottery	B6	Weather	B12



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Threat to date crops

Coachella Valley date growers have joined a regional effort to contain a new invasive insect pest that was recently found in Orange County. B1

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Palm Desert election

Incumbent Palm Desert Mayor Pro Tem Jim Ferguson's campaign is under fire from two elusive detractors. B1

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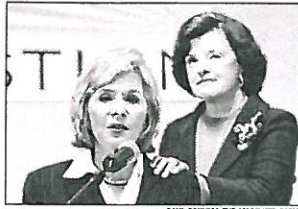
Boxer joined by Feinstein on trail

Democrat touts green jobs at campaign stop

The Associated Press
Sen. Barbara Boxer got a lift Monday from fellow Sen. Dianne Feinstein — the woman regarded as California's most popular politician — as Boxer began the final week of a tough campaign to retain the seat she has held for nearly two decades.

Feinstein emphasized Boxer's senior ranking in the Senate after the two Democrats toured a Silicon Valley solar manufacturing plant that received stimulus funding.

"In the United States Senate, much is accomplished on the basis of advocacy and seniority," Feinstein said. "Sen. Barbara Boxer is a 10 when it



Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., (left) who is running for re-election, speaks as fellow Democratic California Sen. Dianne Feinstein puts her hand on her shoulder during their visit on Monday to solar panel manufacturer Slion Corp. in San Jose.

comes to both." Boxer maintaining a narrowing advantage, 47 percent to 41 percent, against Republican challenger Carly Fiorina, a former Hewlett-Packard Co. chief



Carly Fiorina executive. The National Republican Senatorial Committee is directing another \$3 million toward a round of television ads in the California Senate campaign's final week.

Amber Marchand, a committee spokeswoman, said Monday that the organization has now spent nearly \$8 million in support of Fiorina. The national GOP typically directs its time and money elsewhere, in part because Democrats enjoy a wide registration edge over Republicans in California. Marchand said Monday that the spending demonstrates the committee's confidence in Fiorina's ability to win.

WHITMAN: Says using own money sign of independence

Continued from A1

have in office right now are anti-capitalists."

Whitman's Coachella Valley visit came just after publication of a Los Angeles Times/University of Southern California poll that showed Whitman trailing Brown. The poll of 922 likely voters found Brown leading with 52 percent to Whitman's 39 percent.

In Inglewood, Whitman disputed the poll's findings. "I think the L.A. Times poll is bunk," she said. "Our internal polls show the race much closer or me even ahead."

Brown has spent the last several days on a light campaign schedule. He and Whitman will both appear today at The Women's Conference in Long Beach.

Whitman has actively courted Latino voters in Spanish language TV and radio spots, particularly after a former housekeeper grabbed headlines charging Whitman knew she was an undocumented worker from Mexico.

But the stop at Sun City Shadow Hills — which was open only to residents and attended by



U.S. Rep. Mary Bono Mack.

R-Palm Springs — was clearly aimed at the heart of what Whitman hopes will be an important source of support, affluent Republican retirees.

Supporters displayed colorful, hand-painted signs that read, "Meg + Jobs" and "Latino 4 Meg," provided by Whitman's campaign.

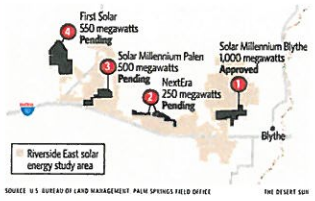
Elise Hooper, president of the Sun City Shadow Hills Republicans, said Whitman's handlers contacted the group Sunday about the visit and sent out a mass e-mail to members.

"She can count on our support, that's one reason why I think they've brought her here," Hooper said.

Asked about the \$140 million-plus of her own money that she's put into her own campaign, Whitman told reporters what she's been saying all along: "It allows me to be independent. When you're investing your own money, you're putting your money where your mouth is," she said.

One down, three to go

The Blythe solar project, at 1,000 megawatts the largest project of its kind ever planned on U.S. public lands, won final approval from the Bureau of Land Management on Monday. Developed by Oakland-based Solar Millennium, the solar thermal plant is the first of four fast-track projects east of the Coachella Valley to receive the final go-ahead from federal officials. The project is up for \$1.9 billion in federal loan guarantees, and regional officials hope it will kick start the green economy in the desert. Approval of the other three projects is pending.



SOLAR: Hiring likely won't start until 2011

Continued from A1

Monday's approval brings Solar Millennium one step closer to \$1.9 billion in federal loan guarantees that are crucial to financing the \$6 billion project, said Billy Owens, the company's director of project development.

The group is already fielding phone calls and e-mails from people looking for jobs and is committed to working with local unions and Riverside County Workforce Development to ensure area residents are hired for the project, he said.

"While the company will start work by the end of the year, Owens doesn't expect a major hiring drive until early 2011."

"Part of the agreement requires we do job and apprenticeship fairs," said Bill Perez, executive secretary of the Riverside and San Bernardino Counties Building and Construction Trades Council. "We're going to coordinate with the (Economic Development) Department, College of the Desert and Palo Verde Community College."

Valley economy

Economist John Husing said the jobs will help the valley's employment figures but may not provide the much-needed fix for the region's housing market — a critical point for overall economic recovery.

Husing gave the valley's overall economy a C-minus at the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership's Economic Summit on Friday, citing the housing issue as the main obstacle to recovery from the recession.

He said getting all four Riverside East solar projects approved and under construction is needed for the synergies that will help revive the housing sector and raise the valley's profile as a center for green energy and manufacturing.

"A one-off won't do it," he said. "At some point, you've got

By the numbers

- Electric production capacity: 1,000 megawatts, enough electricity to power 300,000-750,000 homes
- Jobs: 1,066 construction jobs, 295 permanent jobs
- Property taxes: \$400,000 to Riverside County
- Habitat mitigation: Solar Millennium is providing 8,000 acres of desert habitat for the desert tortoise and other species that may be displaced by the project.

SOURCE: Department of the Interior

Riverside East plants

Solar Millennium's Blythe solar project is the first of four fast-track solar projects in the Riverside East solar zone between Joshua Tree National Park and Blythe.

The other three:

- NextEra Energy's Genesis solar project: 250-megawatt solar thermal plant, state and federal approvals pending.
- Solar Millennium's Palen solar thermal plant: state and federal approvals pending.
- First Solar's Desert Sunlight solar project: 550-megawatt photovoltaic plant, BLM approval pending.

to get to production of the raw materials ... We can install it, but can we make it? I'm not convinced," he said.

Wesley Ahlgren, director of operations for CVER, is more optimistic about the snowball effect the Riverside East projects will have for the region.

While cautioning that any direct economic impact may be another six to 12 months off, he said, "Once we get them in there, we get a critical mass with this industry."

Tools that were on the sidelines will say, "Maybe it's time to relocate or open an office in the desert."

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3.03 CT I-SI2 Retail \$19,000 SALE \$19,999	3.04 CT I-SI3 Retail \$21,000 SALE \$14,999	3.35 CT J-VS1 Retail \$45,000 SALE \$34,999	4.69 CT Fancy Yellow Retail \$75,000 SALE \$49,999
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