



The Desert Sun

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2014

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Palm Desert 42, Indio 14
Shadow Hills 48, Twentynine Palms 7
Desert Chapel 60, Cornerstone Christian 6
Desert Christian Academy 67, Palm Valley 0
Yucca Valley 23, Desert Mirage 16 (2OT)

Read all about the action in Sports

USA TODAY NOBEL PRIZE WINNER MALALA A HERO TO MANY IN PAKISTAN **PAGE 1B**

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ENERGY SUMMIT

Batteries, storage could shape future

Tesla co-founder says automaker has its eyes on Salton Sea's potential

By **Sammy Roth**
The Desert Sun

Tesla probably won't build its next Gigafactory by the Salton Sea, but that shouldn't stop energy storage and battery technology from reshaping the region's energy and transportation landscapes.

Energy storage and electric vehicles were hot topics at Friday's Southern California Energy Summit in Palm Springs, where Tesla co-founder J.B. Straubel told The Desert Sun that his company is "keeping a close watch" on efforts to extract lithium from geothermal brine by the Salton Sea. Lithium is a key ingredient in the bat-

teries that power the electric vehicles produced by Tesla and other automakers. If large-scale lithium extraction by the Salton Sea proves commercially viable, the area's massive mineral resources could reshape global lithium markets and supply battery manufacturers around the world. But Tesla chose to build its first bat-

tery factory in Nevada, which has no income taxes and a relatively low minimum wage. Straubel said Friday that where the company builds its next Gigafactory will be determined mostly by economic factors — not by whether there's plentiful lithium being produced by the Salton Sea.

The location of lithium production "doesn't have a very big impact on where

Please see **SUMMIT, A7**



WESSMAN DEVELOPMENT

The latest sketch of Block A in the Museum Market Plaza.

Downtown ready for milestone

Palm Springs to break ground on Kimpton lot

By **Skip Descant**
The Desert Sun

The shiny shovels are getting dusted off as Palm Springs prepares for one of its most anticipated groundbreaking of recent times.

City officials will join others from Wessman Development and Kimpton Hotel & Restaurants on Thursday for the official groundbreaking of a new 155-room, six-story Kimpton brand hotel in downtown.

"I think this is absolutely huge. New product is always wonderful. It's new, and people will flock to it," said Mayor Steve Pougnet on Friday afternoon.

"And hotel deals are not easy deals to be done in this country. So from the standpoint of how important it is for the city, it's hugely important," he added.

The hotel is part of the larger redevelopment of downtown where the former Desert Fashion Plaza once stood. Construction for the Kimpton hotel is set to last for about the next 16 months. And

Please see **KIMPTON, A8**

SHARING VALLEY ROADS

Deaths spur speed worries



JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

Traffic on Highway 111 in south Palm Springs travels at about 50 mph near Gene Autry Trail on Oct. 7.

Residents reconsidering high limits on arterials

By **Colin Atagi**
The Desert Sun

As traffic reached 50 mph, it created a breeze that Jason Roman could feel as he jogged along East Palm Canyon Drive in Palm Springs.

It's a scenario that plays out whenever he uses the stretch just west of Gene Autry Trail, where more than 29,000 vehicles pass on a daily basis.

Roman goes just as fast when he's driving, but he'll stop to think about the posted speed limit whenever he enters pedestrian mode.

"That's when you become an observer and see how fast cars go," said Roman, 42, of Palm Springs. "It's probably safe, but you kind of wonder."

Speed limits across the Coachella Valley are a concern among many residents.

At least 51 pedestrians have been killed since 2008, according to the California Office of Traffic Safety and local law enforcement. Speeding was behind some. Drugs, alcohol and poor visibility were factors in others.

The question is whether it's unusual

Please see **SPEED, A8**



MAUREEN GILMER/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

Room to bloom

The Desert Horticultural Society of the Coachella Valley is presenting the 9th Annual Desert Garden Community Day on Oct. 18. The event will gather experts on planting desert-friendly foliage that will beautify your landscape while conserving water.

HOME AND GARDEN, D1

Luscious blue flowers and seed pods that snap loudly make ruellia a fun garden plant if handled with care.

HI 97° LO 71°
Sunny and hot.
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Prince Albert shares his hopes for Sunnylands oceans retreat
COACHELLA VALLEY, A4

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Salton Sea is still 'begging for dignity,' says IID official

By Sammy Roth
The Desert Sun

Officials on Friday sparred over the future of geothermal development by the Salton Sea, dredging up a controversial bill that failed in the state Legislature earlier this year.

Speaking at the Southern California Energy Summit in Palm Springs, Imperial Irrigation District general manager Kevin Kelley criticized state officials on his panel for not supporting the bill, which would have mandated 500 megawatts of new geothermal development in California.

"None of your agencies were a hell of a lot of help," Kelley said to a panel that included top officials from the California Public Utilities Commission and the California Independent System Operator.

"I hope I'm not still here next year, reminding everybody that the Salton Sea is begging for dignity."

Local leaders for years have touted geothermal development as critical to funding the restoration of the Salton Sea, which has been receding as agricultural runoff declines.

But while the sea is home to one of the world's best geothermal reservoirs, developing that energy is expensive. And only one new plant has opened since 2000.

Geothermal advocates had hoped that state Senate Bill 1139 — sponsored by Sen. Ben Hueso, a San Diego Democrat who represents parts of the Coachella Valley — would jump start geothermal activity by the sea.

But after facing opposition from major utilities and the public utilities commission, the bill stalled in the Assembly.

Michael Peevey, the controversial outgoing president of the California Public Utilities Commission, said his agency opposed Hueso's bill because it would have increased electricity rates.

California's renewable energy portfolio standard requires utilities to buy 33 percent of their energy from renewable sources by 2020, but solar and wind power are significantly cheaper than geothermal.

The utilities commission, Peevey not-

ed, has instructed utilities to sign contracts for renewable energy using a "least-cost, best-fit" standard, which prioritizes minimizing the cost to electricity consumers. That was the standard mandated by the Legislature when it launched the renewable energy portfolio standard.

"We saw earmarking 500 megawatts of geothermal energy, with a lack of transmission capacity, as being contrary to that policy direction that we have and that we've been following for some time," Peevey said.

Kelley countered that by criticizing the utilities commission for not considering the benefits of geothermal in fighting climate change.

Because they operate 24 hours per day, Kelley said geothermal plants can supplement intermittent wind and solar power — a role that is now played largely by greenhouse gas-emitting natural gas plants.

"This least-cost, best-fit methodology has resulted in a procurement strategy that has left geothermal out," Kelley said Friday.

"And we're told that it's because geothermal is uneconomic, and it's not the right time, but I don't think it's the [renewable energy portfolio standard] that ought to drive public policy. I think it ought to be climate."

Kelley also blasted opponents of Hueso bill's opponents for suggesting it unfairly favors geothermal, saying the renewables portfolio standard has been "a series of carve-outs."

Pressed by Kelley on the urgency of generating funds to restore the Salton Sea, Peevey said the public utilities commission was willing to work with Hueso to develop a strategy for expanding geothermal production by the sea.

But Hueso "didn't pursue that," Peevey noted.

"I don't want to see a stalemate, but there are a whole host of challenges," Peevey said. "You don't get 500 megawatts by just mandating it in the legislature."

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Summit

Continued from A1

we do production," Straubel, Tesla's chief technology officer, told The Desert Sun.

Straubel's assessment is likely to deflate local enthusiasm over the possibility of a Tesla arrival, a much buzzed-about topic while the electric automaker mulled where to build its first Gigafactory. That battery factory, which will be built near Reno, will employ about 6,500 people and could generate \$100 billion in economic benefits, Nevada officials have estimated.

Locally, Tesla has been eyeing Simbol Materials, a Pleasanton-based company that has been testing an innovative lithium-extraction process by the Salton Sea. Tracy Sizemore, Simbol's vice president of business development, said he wasn't surprised to hear that Tesla probably won't build a battery factor in the Imperial Valley.

Lithium, Sizemore said, is "not a driver for battery costs."

"Their significant costs are electricity, land, taxes, labor," he said. "They're more supply-constrained than location-constrained."

Simbol plans to break ground in January on a facility that will produce 15,000 metric tons of lithium per year. While battery manufacturers might not flock to the region once that plant is finished, Sizemore acknowledged, he expects that Simbol will supply lithium for many electric automakers and battery manufacturers.

Whether Tesla will be one of those companies, however, is an open question.

"Lithium is a resource that here in the valley is in somewhat plentiful supply. There are some companies working on mining that," Straubel said during his presentation at the energy summit. "There are also a lot of other companies around the world trying to find new ways to extract resources cheaper."

Tesla aside, state officials and energy experts predicted at the summit that energy storage technology — including lithium-ion batteries — will radically change the way we power our homes and vehicles in the coming years. The technology is still too expensive to be deployed on a wide scale, but it's considered critical to integrating more renewable power into the state's energy mix.

Solar plants, for instance, generate the most electricity during the middle of the day, but peak energy use occurs in the evening. That's why most solar farms must be supplemented by natural gas-fired power plants, which produce half as much carbon as coal-fired plants — but still far more than solar farms.

If electricity providers could store large quantities of solar power during the day and send it to consumers in the evening, it would be far easier for California to move toward 100 percent renewable energy — which, Straubel said, he would like to make possible.

"We're quite close to having the economics work to be able to do storage at this level, using the same type of batteries that are going into vehicles," he said.

Angelina Galiteva — a member of the board of governors of the California In-

dependent System Operator, which manages the state's electricity grid — said a lack of storage has already forced state officials to turn excess solar power away from the grid.

"What's our biggest problem? Low-cost renewables — an abundance of them we have to curtail," Galiteva said. "Five years ago, that would have been good news. Now we're afraid of it."

State regulators have already taken action to boost energy storage. California Public Utilities Commission president Michael Peevey said the commission mandated last year that major utilities buy at least 1.3 gigawatts of energy storage by 2020, including 200 megawatts from private homes and businesses.

Peevey also cited efforts by rooftop solar companies like SolarCity to invest in battery storage technology. If those companies can help energy consumers produce and store their own electricity, they will essentially be taking their customers off the grid.

SolarCity's batteries, Peevey added, will probably be produced at Tesla's Gigafactory in Nevada. Tesla chief executive Elon Musk is also chairman of SolarCity.

Peevey and Galiteva both joined a panel about the future of the state's renewables portfolio standard, which currently mandates that utilities buy 33 percent of their power from renewable sources by 2020. The panelists generally agreed that California will need to increase that mandate to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, as mandated by executive order.

They cautioned, however, that policymakers will need to do more than raise the renewable energy mandate to meet that goal.

About 43 percent of the state's carbon emissions, Galiteva noted, come from the transportation sector. Stuart Hemphill, Southern California Edison's senior vice president for power supply and operational services, said electric vehicles have a key role to play in reducing the state's emissions.

"The biggest opportunity we have to reduce greenhouse gases today is in the transportation sector, and everybody who's looked at the math understands that," Hemphill said.

Straubel believes the transportation industry is approaching a "tipping point" where electric cars can compete with traditional gas-powered vehicles.

"The fundamental technology making that possible is continuing to improve," he said. "Gasoline is not getting much better. It doesn't really change."

However, California officials choose to promote emissions reductions, other states — and even countries — are likely to follow suit. If California were a country, Galiteva noted, it would have the seventh-largest economy in the world.

"We can't have the attitude, 'We need to wait for India or China to take action before we do,'" she said. "We only stand to win. We have the institutions, we have Silicon Valley, we have the technologies. If there's a global market for the export of our technologies, why not?"

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