

**MSC POLITICAL FORUM** Everyone is Welcome!

## Political Forum General Committee Meeting

Wed. April 15th 7 p.m.  
301 Rudder

**Committee Awards Will Be Presented**

## Mauro offers pistachio farm as good land-use example

By Olivier Uyttebrouck  
Senior Staff Writer

Texas Land Commissioner Gary Mauro said Tuesday that the state must find new ways of using the millions of acres of land it manages rather than rely entirely on oil and gas revenues and offered a west Texas pistachio farm as one possible solution.

Mauro also described a 62-acre Oriental vegetable farm near Tomball, owned by the General Land Office and operated by Cambodian refugees as an example of creative land use.

The entire 900,000 acres managed by Mauro's General Land Office yields only \$500,000 in surface revenues, largely from grazing leases, he said. In addition, 200,000 acres of land in the trans-Pecos region, managed by his office, is currently unleased because of the aridity of the region, he said.

Mauro, speaking at an MSC Great Issues event in Rudder Tower said that innovative land uses such as aquaculture, specialized crop farming and recreational hunting could increase the revenues generated by these lands, and he emphasized the role of the state's agricultural schools in designing these programs.

One such program is a 320-acre pistachio tree orchard the Land Office is creating in the trans-Pecos region of the state, he said. The 18,000 seedlings are currently in a greenhouse, and it will be seven years before Texas produces its first crop of pistachios, he said.

Mauro said the land will be planted with asparagus in the meantime.

Though the project was started at a cost of less than \$12,000, Mauro said that if pistachio prices stay where they are, the orchard will produce an income of close to \$500,000 during its 29-year life.

Pistachios were chosen because they are resistant to the saline soil of the region, and because Iran was once the chief producer of pistachios. But, the Iran-embargo has raised the nut's price, he said.

"I hope we can make Texas pistachio-independent," Mauro said.

As another example, Mauro cited



Photo by Bill [unclear]

Texas Land Commissioner Gary Mauro talks with Ajay Raj, president of the MSC Political Forum, after speaking at a Political Forum presentation on land use.

a 62-acre Oriental vegetable farm, started at the urging of Houston officials anxious to find work for a group of newly-arrived Cambodian refugees. Mauro said the Land Office surveyed Oriental restaurants and learned that the many kinds of vegetables they used were all imported from outside the state.

Eighteen Cambodians make their living entirely from the 16-variety vegetable patch. Other truck farmers in the area are beginning to get into what Mauro describes as a "tremendous market" in Oriental vegetables.

"And now that land produces of \$35 a year in revenue for the state," Mauro said.

Mauro defended his office's ranch loan program which makes available low-interest loans up to \$100,000 available to farmers. Such loans have a seven multiplier effect, he said. Earlier loaned to a small farmer, change hands five to seven times the local community.

## 20 percent of El Paso's vehicles flunk new tailpipe emissions test

EL PASO (AP) — Up to 20 percent of the city's vehicles are flunking new tests designed to bring El Paso's air into compliance with federal standards for carbon monoxide, officials say.

El Paso is the only city in Texas that exceeds carbon monoxide ceilings set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The tailpipe emissions test began in January and since then, an estimated 15 percent to 20 percent of the 70,000 vehicles tested have failed, said Danny Wilkinson of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The EPA won't begin compiling statistics until August. The tailpipe emission tests are part of the mandatory annual inspection of vehicles.

In most cases, minor repairs will bring the vehicles into compliance

with emission standards, Wilkinson said Monday.

As expected, low-income areas had the highest rate of failures, said Sgt. Glenn Wood of the DPS.

The DPS is in charge of training and registering service stations that administer the tests. The agency also runs checks to make sure attendants at the service stations are inspecting the vehicles properly for signs of tampering with anti-pollution devices and for non-compliance with emissions standards.

So far this year, six inspectors in El Paso have been suspended for one year for "flagrant" violations of inspection procedures, Wilkinson said. Seven stations have been fined and 17 warnings have been issued.

At a meeting sponsored by the League of Women Voters, El Paso residents quizzed air pollution officials on how successful the program is going to be with its air pollution control program.

Raul Munoz, head of the environmental division of the City-County Health District, said El Paso always has air pollution problems because it is next to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Vehicles in Juarez generally are in worse condition than in El Paso and are not required to have anti-pollution devices.

Last week, EPA and DPS officials stopped about 500 cars throughout the city to check for tampered anti-pollution devices, said Wilkinson.

Officials say they are aware of drivers register their vehicles in Juarez or in neighboring New Mexico, which also does not have pollution controls.

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