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Green energy powers to the top of Sacramento chamber's lobbying list in D.C.

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Published 12:00 am PDT Tuesday, April 8, 2008

WASHINGTON – Clean-energy technology, which last year was not even on the agenda, was a top advocacy item for the Sacramento Metro Chamber on Monday as 350 of its members spread out over Capitol Hill on the business organization's annual Capitol-to-Capitol lobbying trip.

"For Sacramento and the region, clean energy is becoming an economic driver," said John DiStasio, a Sacramento Municipal Utility District general manager and co-leader director of chamber's Clean/Green Technology Team.

The team, like the dozen others, will meet with the Sacramento congressional delegation, California Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, and other congressional and Bush administration leaders in search of federal dollars and specific legislation benefiting the region.

Among the larger teams are those focused on flood control, transportation, clean technology and health care issues – the four leading topics of the chamber's 38th annual lobbying trip.

The Sacramento Metro Chamber's entourage has taken over several floors of the Mayflower Hotel where the participants will stay until the trip winds down Wednesday. Attendance has been capped for several years at 350 members.

Monday's kickoff breakfast included remarks by U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab and Edward Lazear, head of the White House Council of Economic Advisers. Lazear noted Sacramento's 6 percent unemployment rate and 11 percent drop on housing prices, but he said he sees nothing to suggest yet a deepening recession.

"This is not the Great Depression," he said.

Carmichael lawyer Roy Brewer, a co-leader of the flood protection team, said federal money is the top priority.

The Bush administration is seeking about \$58 million for various flood control projects in partnership with the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency. The chamber would like to accelerate that work by increasing the federal spending to \$82.5 million.

The rising star on the lobbying agenda, however, is clean energy technology.

The number of companies in the Sacramento area in pollution-free energy, such as photovoltaic equipment and wind generation, has grown from 60 to 90 in a year, chamber Vice President Michael Faust said. These companies employ about 1,500 workers and pump about \$500 million a year into the economy.

DiStasio said a top chamber goal is the extension of solar energy tax credits now set to expire at the end of the year.

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