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Inland Valley Daily Bulletin (Ontario, CA)

August 9, 2007 Thursday

## Leave it to 'The Encyclopedia' to tackle transportation issues

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**SECTION:** LOCAL

**LENGTH:** 573 words

As traffic in the Inland Empire continues to get worse, many people want to know: What will be done to improve regional transportation?

To help answer that question, the Riverside-based Inland Empire Economic Partnership has recently hired 22-year-old Greg Wright, a Claremont

McKenna College graduate whose knowledge of transportation issues has earned him the nickname "The Encyclopedia."

As the IEPP's director of public policy and government affairs, Wright will be responsible for devising strategies to help the region secure as much funding as possible for transportation projects.

Wright previously held a similar position with the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership. "He has good knowledge of government. He has good knowledge of issues," said Dave Huntoon, a fellow at Claremont McKenna's **Rose Institute** of State and Local Government.

"When he was in the San Gabriel Valley, he did a lot with transportation, went to a lot of conferences, and actually went to Sacramento to testify on the interests of the San Gabriel Valley on some of these issues."

Wright had just finished a year as a congressional page in Washington, D.C., when he arrived in Claremont in 2002, shortly after he turned 17.

He enrolled in college without ever getting a high school diploma, and the quick pace of his education continued in Claremont. When he graduated in 2005, he was only 19 years old.

Wright said he has always had an interest in government. When asked how he developed the interest, he draws a blank. "I've wondered myself a few times," he said. "I think it's just intrinsic. I'd always been interested in current affairs, and I almost just naturally became interested in government and government affairs. Being in Washington just cemented all that."

Jack Pitney, a government professor at Claremont

McKenna, had Wright in his Congress class, where they would have mock legislative sessions.

When the class tackled Social Security, Wright quickly became an expert on the subject, Pitney recalled.

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"Other students relied on him heavily for his policy knowledge," Pitney said. "It takes a great deal of study, and it takes a knack for it. Greg has always had an impressive amount of intellect and the ability to absorb a huge amount of knowledge in a short time.

"The average at CMC is pretty darn high, and Greg was way above average," Pitney added.

Wright said there are many proposed solutions for improving the region's traffic circulation, but funding for the ideas is lacking.

"The key is really new revenue sources," Wright said. "The existing revenue sources are not adequate."

It will be Wright's job to identify the most promising projects and devise strategies to successfully pitch them to state and federal officials.

Currently, Wright said, there are two possible transportation fixes most commonly talked among regional planners.

The first is an idea to begin charging a container fee at the region's ports that would be used to fund infrastructure for the movement of cargo to Inland Empire warehouses.

The other potential solution being discussed is to begin pursuing partnerships between government and private companies to raise money for new projects.

The regulatory environment in Sacramento is currently cool to the idea, but Wright and others believe that such partnerships would quickly produce results for residents.

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**LOAD-DATE:** August 9, 2007

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newspaper

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