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## **Viewpoints: It's no time to drop ball on environment**

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Special to The Bee

Clean energy. Clean water. Clean air. As California turns to Gov. Jerry Brown's budget proposal, many critics will claim that California can neither afford innovative environmental measures nor fund its existing environmental programs.

Our newly released study, "An Environmental Blueprint for California," argues just the opposite: California cannot afford to throw away years of environmental progress – cleaner energy, cleaner water, cleaner air – for perceived short-term gains. Energy security, climate stability, and public health depend on strong, innovative environmental protection initiatives that will help to ensure long-term economic prosperity.

Brown's return to the Capitol comes at a critical moment in California's history. The state's long-term prosperity is vulnerable to climate change, energy insecurity, environmental threats to public health and a growing scarcity of key resources. California is exceptionally well placed to overcome these challenges, but doing so will require tough choices and strong leadership. The election of Brown and the voters' clear repudiation of Proposition 23 show that Californians want strong action in favor of a clean, healthy, prosperous future.

California's historic environmental leadership has advanced our economy and public health enormously. The California Air Resources Board estimates that our state's climate change initiatives will save households hundreds of dollars of energy costs each year by 2020 and provide air quality improvements worth more than \$4 billion by 2020. EPA estimates that every dollar spent to reduce mercury air emissions by cement plants will return between \$7 and \$19 in reduced health costs.

Ironically, we underfund even basic environmental regulatory activities that can be used to make sure that those who cause harms – rather than all taxpayers – pay to protect us from those harms. Brown must establish stable, robust funding for core environmental regulatory activities. Environmental monitoring, permit-writing and enforcement are at risk, despite the clear successes from our state's four decades of environmental protection: cleaner air, water and energy.

California should also use funding more efficiently. For example, in our blueprint we propose a comprehensive, statewide system of environmental monitoring and modeling. Currently, various state and local agencies undertake a wide variety of environmental monitoring and assessment, much of which could be combined to promote more efficient use of funding and state resources.

Future climate and energy instability will test California's foundation for environmental protection. Continued reliance on coal, gasoline, and other pollution-heavy energy sources will bog down our economy, jeopardize our public health, and leave us vulnerable to changing energy markets and climate impacts.

California should instead seize this opportunity to position itself as a leader in local, stable, renewable energy production. Brown has already recognized the need for renewable energy investment and the economic benefits of this investment. A California nonpartisan organization, Next 10, recently found that employment in green businesses increased 45 percent between 1995 and 2008. Clean energy generation, energy efficiency and green transportation are just a few of these growing green sectors of California's economy.

California needs a statewide renewable power payment program that rewards homeowners and businesses who invest in solar panels that distribute energy to the grid, by compensating them for that energy generation. A study by the UCLA Luskin Center determined that a 600-megawatt renewable power payment program in Los Angeles could save residential ratepayers money over the long term while creating economic opportunities.

California also needs to make it easier for residents to get money up front to pay for renewable energy installations and energy efficiency improvements to their properties. These renewable energy and efficiency initiatives require leadership from the governor and the Legislature – visionary new laws and visionary new initiatives from our state agencies – in order for us to reach them.

In traditional areas of environmental regulation, many cost-effective initiatives are available to California that would benefit both the environment and the economy. California should charge polluters for the privilege of using its limited environmental resources. Increased monitoring of particle pollution and better enforcement of existing standards can help to prevent the estimated 18,000 premature deaths from such pollution that occur in California each year. This type of environmental protection pays for itself many times over in benefits to our residents' health, resulting in a healthier, happier and more productive workforce.

California faces difficult choices in its looming budget battle. Clean energy, clean water and clean air require the devotion of significant resources but come with even larger benefits. If California does not recognize the long-term value of protecting its environment, then the state will face ever more difficult choices in an uncertain future.