

[Bakersfield Californian Op-Ed, Sunday, Feb. 28, 2016:](#)

## **Florez's appointment to CARB a fitting move**

One would think clean-air advocates from one of the nation's most air-quality challenged regions would have a regular place in the state agency charged with cleaning up that air. One would be wrong. Until now.

This month's appointment of Shafter native Dean Florez, a former state assemblyman and senator, to the California Air Resources Board ends decades of urban domination of that agency. Representatives of the Los Angeles basin and San Francisco Bay Area have had the strongest influence on the board, and not entirely without justification, but consequently the Central Valley has largely lacked the voice it needs and deserves.

Assembly Speaker Toni G. Atkins' AB 1288, recently signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown, changes all that. The law expands CARB from 12 members to 14, with the two additional members to be selected from "environmental justice communities."

To fill one of those spots, Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon selected a man who knows his way around Sacramento as well as Bakersfield. Florez served in the California Senate 2002-2010 and in the California Assembly 1998-2002, where he represented Bakersfield, Fresno and 18 other valley cities. He served as chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Air Quality and authored a series of air emission laws focused on the San Joaquin Valley's air.

In Florez, De Leon made the right choice based on the location of the state's greatest air-quality needs. And in doing so, he bucked pressure from all the power players in the state's urban areas, including environmental justice activists from Oakland and elsewhere who sought to fill the seat with someone who likely would have steered CARB away from the realities of the state's demographic map.

That reality is that some of California's worst air pollution happens to envelop the state's most disadvantaged communities, which are overwhelmingly in the Central Valley and Kern County in particular.

That's precisely where future cap-and-trade dollars should go. Florez is now in a position to help steer it there.

De Leon has helped ensure a better path for the Central Valley by recognizing this region's need for representation. He made an innovative, smart choice that acknowledges the Central Valley's specific concerns — concerns that valley legislators have often felt unable to address.

As a result of AB 1288, the Central Valley is in a significantly better position to get its fair share of pollution-fighting resources.

Atkins, D-San Diego, said she wrote the bill specifically to address the needs of the approximately 8 million Californians who live in areas considered to be highly impacted by environmental problems. "They need to be heard," Atkins said on the occasion of the bill's signing. That's why, she said, the additional two CARB seats will be held only by people who have worked in those communities.

Air pollution exposure accounts for 19,000 premature deaths, 280,000 cases of asthma, and nearly 2 million lost work days each year, according to CARB. In California, people of color face a 50 percent higher chance of cancer due to air pollutants.

Florez, who now lives in Los Angeles, says his experience representing the poor, largely Latino communities in the southern San Joaquin Valley make him the right man for the job because nobody knows the area's air quality problems at a policy level better than he does.

All right, then, Mr. Florez — you've been given a great opportunity to act on your convictions. Congratulations. Now get to work.