

What it means to state

Reform targets everything from licensing to lottery

By Cheryl Miller

[Stockton Record, Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2004](#)

Gov. Schwarzenegger received a sweeping proposal Tuesday to overhaul state government that could change profoundly the way Californians renew their driver's licenses, enroll their children in school and even play the lottery.

The 2,500-page report, commissioned by Schwarzenegger in January, contains more than 1,200 recommendations for streamlining government operations and saving California \$32 billion over the next five years.

Among the ideas: allowing drivers to renew their licenses online, requiring kindergartners to be 5 years old by Sept. 1 rather than Dec. 2 and joining a multistate lottery to lure more fortune-seeking Californians.

The plan would eliminate 117 boards and commissions and cut 12,000 state jobs through attrition.

Lawmakers already have criticized some elements, and the proposal faces an uncertain future of public hearings around the state, review by two commissions and finally the scrutiny of a Democrat-controlled Legislature.

"Every one of these recommendations goes somebody's ox, so everything's going to be a fight," Democratic consultant Darry Sragow said.

The 275 volunteers who wrote the report recommended the elimination of the Delta Protection Commission, a 19-member body that monitors land use in five counties that surround the waterway.

The report said the commission duplicates the work of other agencies and recommends dividing its duties among three new or revamped departments.

Former state Sen. Patrick Johnston, a Stockton Democrat, wrote the legislation that created the commission in 1992 and said he would be open to some changes in structure but not in mission.

"Everyone should keep an eye on the ball, and the ball is protection of the resources," Johnston said Tuesday. "The methods by which each era engages the problems -- levee breaks, encroaching urbanization or water exports to Southern California -- can change."

Other commissions slated for elimination in the report include the state Regional Water Quality Control and the Air Resources boards, both of which have been active in San Joaquin County -- not always to the pleasure of the region's elected leaders.

The boards' activities would be shifted to other agencies controlled more directly by the governor.

Rico Mastrodonato, Northern California director of the League of Conservation Voters, said state residents should be wary of any plan to shift decision-making power to state-agency executives who don't meet in public.

"It will leave the public with virtually no recourse if it's confronted with bad environmental decisions," Mastrodonato said. "Decisions that are made in the open are more likely to lead to decisions that are in the best interest of public health and the environment."

Lawmakers and agency officials were just beginning to pore over the hefty review report Tuesday and had few opinions on specifics.

State Sen. Charles Poochigian, R-Fresno, whose district includes the Lodi area, urged his colleagues and early critics to keep an open mind.

"There are going to be parts that I like and parts that I don't like," he said. "That's going to be true of every legislator. But if legislators approach this with parochial or special interests in mind and a mind-set that resists change, then we're not going to be very successful."

Senate President Pro Tem John Burton, D-San Francisco, already predicted Monday that lawmakers would reject many of the large-scale proposals while working with the governor on more-modest changes.

The report will challenge the governor to stick by his early campaign pledges to "blow up the boxes" of government operations, Republican consultant Dan Schnur said.

"Arnold Schwarzenegger ran for governor as an outsider and reformer. This gets him back on that track," Schnur said. "There's no question he's been accomplishing quite a bit in Sacramento, but for the most part he's been working inside the system. There's nothing wrong with working inside the system, but his politics have always centered on his reputation of working outside the system."

Smoke from Mother Lode fire chokes the Valley's summer air

Controlled burn briefly escapes its boundary

By Adam Ashton

[Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2004](#)

MARIPOSA -- Smoke from a 450-acre controlled vegetation burn in Mariposa billowed over the San Joaquin Valley on Tuesday, but California Department of Forestry firefighters kept the flames in check.

The burn took place in a scrub oak forest along Highway 140, about three miles west of Mariposa. The fire focused on the road's southern bank, but briefly skipped over the freeway and burned 1 acre on the northern side in the early afternoon.

"We were right on top of that," said Information Officer Jodie Stanners of the MaderaMariposa-Merced CDF station.

Landowner Frank Long worked with the CDF to plan the vegetation fire, incident Cmdr. Dennis Tannahill said. Some were caught off guard by the burn, however, because the CDF did not announce it until Tuesday morning.

Tannahill said the agency wasn't sure it would proceed with the fire until Monday afternoon, but good weather, clear air quality and better resources provided by firefighters returning from blazes around the state contributed to the agency's decision to go ahead Tuesday.

Tannahill said firefighters would check the burned area over the next few days to make sure flames do not rekindle.

He said the vegetation burn could benefit firefighters down the road if a wildfire breaks out in the area.

"It certainly would give us a toehold," he said.

The California Highway Patrol controlled traffic along the highway during the burn. The Mariposa County Fire Department and Mariposa County Sheriff's Department also contributed to keeping the fire in check, officials said.

"This has gone very well -- according to plan," Stanners said.

Breathe easier -- idling rigs banned

New rules for trucks, buses taking aim at practice which wastes fuel, pours out pollution

[Merced Sun-Star, Editorial, Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2004](#)

When the driver of a big rig stops at a diner for lunch and leaves his truck idling for an hour, he not only wastes fuel, he pumps soot and smog-forming toxic chemicals into the air. Diesel exhaust accounts for 70 percent of California's air pollution.

It can irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lungs, as well as cause coughs, headaches, lightheadedness and nausea.

In the past, drivers let buses and trucks idle because they thought it would be hard to restart them in cold weather. New engine technologies and improved fuels make such idling unnecessary.

New state rules that ban unnecessary idling for buses and big trucks will cut soot emissions by an estimated 166 tons a year and nitrogen oxides (key components of smog) by 5,200 tons. The rules took effect last month. They bar drivers from unnecessary idling that lasts longer than five minutes. Violators can be fined \$100.

As defined by regulators, idling is unnecessary when it's done because of a concern the truck or bus will not restart, to warm up the engine for more than five minutes before actual operation or, in the case of a bus, while waiting for passengers when no passengers are on board. Idling will be allowed for running auxiliary equipment such a cement mixer or a refrigerator for fresh produce in a truck's cargo bay.

In 2009, more stringent rules will bar idling to operate air conditioners, heaters, TV sets and other unnecessary equipment in the sleep compartment of big-rig trucks. Drivers will have to buy nonpolluting generators. Over the life of the truck, regulators say, such equipment will save money on fuel and engine wear and tear.

According to the state Air Resources Board staff report, each big-rig driver can save 125 gallons of fuel a year by adhering to the idling control measures.

Finally, the anti-idling rules are not another exotic California-only regulation. The ARB reports that at least 20 other states and dozens of counties and municipalities have anti-idling rules in place, some more stringent than the California rule. They exist because they save fuel and protect the environment.

Everyone needs to help clean up the Valley's air

[Stockton Record, Editorial, Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2004](#)

San Joaquin Valley residents have every reason to be worried about the air they breathe.

It's dirtier than ever.

Less than a month after learning the Valley had failed another federal clean-air standard, the Public Policy Institute of California made official what most residents already knew.

We worry as much about pollution as those who live near smoggy Los Angeles.

The latest concern is fine-particulate pollution, a dangerous, unseen substance.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports Valley air violates standards that measure soot, dust and vapor floating around us in microscopic specks.

These tiny particulates easily lodge in human lungs, often finding their way into the bloodstream.

This type of pollution causes more deaths in California each year than AIDS, homicides and automobile accidents combined, according to the EPA.

It's blamed for various causes of death -- heart and lung diseases, fatal asthma attacks, and other chronic health problems.

In 2001, the Environmental Working Group estimated fine-particulate pollution claimed the lives of 251 San Joaquin County residents. Statewide, 9,300 deaths annually are blamed on fine particulates.

The tiny toxic matter is a byproduct of population growth. Normal daily activity can set it in motion.

It's found in the movement of ordinary dust, industrial waste, campfires and fireplaces, routine farming operations and construction sites.

The Valley is highly vulnerable.

It's no wonder we worry about air as much as L.A.-area residents do -- and at a much higher rate than the rest of the state.

In 2000, only 28 percent of the Valley's residents considered air pollution a major problem. Today, it's almost half.

Reversing the trend will require involvement by everyone.

No matter how many penalties or incentives government regulators dream up, lasting solutions are based on changes in lifestyle and business practices.

The Valley's regional watchdogs already are demanding limited burn days for farmers and homeowners with fireplaces, and restrictions on agricultural machine operations.

Motor vehicles, another source of fine particulates, also are being targeted, but there are millions of them in the Valley.

We drive them greater distances than most Californians. They are the largest source of soot and toxic vapors, making them the most difficult to control.

Skyrocketing gasoline prices eventually might drive motorists toward carpooling and hybrid vehicles. That would help reduce the volume of fine particulates.

The Valley isn't quite as engulfed in a brown haze as the Los Angeles Basin, but air pollution has become a huge worry.

It will take lifestyle alterations by millions of individuals, businesses and farmers to change this dirty, dangerous trend.

If Valley residents remain stubbornly unwilling to change habits on their own, federal and state regulators can be counted on to force the issue.

In the case of fine particulates, it's a matter of life and death.

How small is small?

The newest targets of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are tiny specks of soot, dust and vapor known as fine particulates.

They're smaller than 2.5 microns wide.

How small is that?

If you put 30 such particles end to end, they would be about as wide as a single strand of human hair.

New wood stoves also burn clean

[San Francisco Chronicle, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2004](#)

Editor -- The article on the SimpleFire fireplace briquettes, and air pollution from burning wood in fireplaces ("Clean fire comes in paper bag, " Hot Stuff, July 28) neglected to mention that there is a responsible alternative to giving up wood fires. New wood stoves must be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency to be low-polluting. Some prefabricated fireplaces are also EPA-rated to be as clean-burning as wood stoves. EPA-rated wood burning devices are much more efficient, so the heat generated goes further to actually heat the house. Because EPA-rated wood burning devices emit very little smoke, they are excluded from air pollution agency requests to not use fireplaces during smoggy winter weather. See the Bay Area Air Quality District's Web site at www.baqmd.gov for more information (from the home page, go to "pollution prevention," then "Wood Burning Handbook").

GARY FARBER

Walnut Creek

[In political news addressing air quality:](#)

Kerry takes swipe at Cheney in speech

White House calls his reference to V.P.'s meeting with energy officials a personal attack

By MARY DALRYMPLE, The Associated Press
[Orange County Register, Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2004](#)

BELOIT, WIS. - Democrat John Kerry, in a swipe at Vice President Dick Cheney, said Tuesday that he won't dole out special favors to corporations if elected president.

"My vice president of the United States will never meet secretly with polluters who want to rewrite the environmental laws," the presidential nominee told a cheering crowd at a hockey arena.

The barb referred to Cheney, who met with industry officials while drafting proposed new energy laws. Democrats want more information about those meetings and have argued that Cheney, the former head of Halliburton Co., had allowed the loosening of clean air and water rules at the behest of corporations.

At the town hall meeting, Kerry also spoke about the economy and his plan to balance the budget. Kerry wants to roll back President George W. Bush's tax cuts for families making more than \$200,000 annually and rid the tax code of narrow breaks that help powerful companies who contribute to political campaigns.

Kerry said he counts \$65 billion that goes to corporations "for no really good reason at all."

"You go through those pages, ladies and gentlemen, and there's gobbledygook that is hard to interpret," he said. "The only people who can interpret it are the people who paid for it with the campaign finance system."

Responding to Kerry's remarks, the Bush-Cheney campaign said the comment on corporations was a personal attack on Cheney. "This is part of his bizarre, personal diatribe that he issued at the convention during his acceptance speech," said spokesman Terry Holt.

Holt also argued that Kerry's plan to roll back tax cuts for wealthier taxpayers means a tax increase on small business. "John Kerry's economic plan would derail this economic recovery by raising taxes on those who create jobs in this country," he said.

Kerry also promised to cut the federal deficit in half during four years. To do that, he said, he wants the power to veto individual spending decisions made by Congress and to enforce budget caps with automatic spending cuts.