

Brown takes emissions plea to Washington

State's attorney general goes to the EPA and a Senate panel, seeking authority for strict rules.

By David Whitney - Bee Washington Bureau

Sacramento Bee and Modesto Bee, Wednesday, May 23, 2007

WASHINGTON -- State Attorney General Jerry Brown appealed Tuesday to the Environmental Protection Agency for a waiver so California and 11 other states can impose rules on car and truck emissions more stringent than those permitted by the Clean Air Act in an effort to combat global warming.

Later, Brown took his message to Capitol Hill, telling the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee that nothing is more essential now than for the United States to act boldly to curb carbon dioxide emissions that most scientists believe are causing the Earth to warm at a dangerous rate.

"This is bigger than Iraq," Brown told the Senate panel, headed by Sen. Barbara Boxer, also a California Democrat. "It is bigger than immigration. It's not tomorrow, but it's coming around. The stakes have never been higher."

But there was no indication that Brown's pitch would move the EPA to grant the needed waiver that has been pending since 2005. Bush administration critics, including Brown, charged that the EPA is stalling any action in concert with the U.S. auto and petroleum industries.

Brown vowed to sue the agency if it doesn't issue the waiver by October.

California needs the waiver if it is to enforce a 2002 state law requiring automakers to cut emissions from cars and trucks by 30 percent by 2016. The California standard has since been adopted by 11 other states, and a half-dozen more are looking at it. A waiver for California would open the door to the tougher standard applying to a third of the cars and light trucks sold in the country.

The issue has taken on huge significance for the states because only California can seek exceptions under the Clean Air Act to national emission standards, because of its unique air quality problems. Many of California's large population centers have trouble combating air pollution that gets trapped in the valleys.

Other states can adopt California standards once a waiver is issued. Many of those states, including New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Maine, sent witnesses to the EPA hearing to back California's claim.

Despite the overwhelming show of force by the states, the auto industry sent just one witness -- Steve Douglas of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers. Douglas said California had not proved the need for the waiver, claiming that if it were granted, the auto industry would face a "patchwork" of unnecessary regulations.

"The auto industry seems to feel the White House is in their pocket," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, an environmental watchdog group. "My guess is that this will drag on, and it will be up to the next administration to see this through."

At the Senate hearing, Case Western Reserve University law school professor Jonathan H. Adler said California might not qualify for a waiver even in the case of global warming.

Adler said the act authorized waivers for California because of its "unique circumstances." But "global climate change by definition is global," he said.

Brown's appearance sparked some fireworks when Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, the panel's senior Republican and the Senate's leading global warming skeptic, charged that the former state governor and one-time presidential aspirant was "grandstanding" on behalf of the state.

Inhofe called it the "height of hypocrisy" for the state to condemn the Bush administration for not acting on the waiver when it was in violation of the Clean Air Act for exceeding soot and ozone levels.

But Brown said soot and ozone problems would only worsen unless global warming is brought under control. He called the state's case "overwhelming," and he blamed the slow pace of the EPA on "raw politics."

"We know (President) Bush is colluding with the automobile companies and the oil companies," Brown said. "He's an oil man."

EPA officials sat through the administrative hearing but gave no hint of how -- or when -- the agency might rule.

Boxer said she was calling EPA Administrator Steve Johnson to a hearing before her committee on June 21 and pledged that "I will personally leave this podium and give him a big hug" if the EPA head announces approval of the waiver then.

State pressures EPA on emissions law

By Zachary Coile, Chronicle Washington bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, May 23, 2007

Washington -- California political leaders challenged the Environmental Protection Agency to "get out of the way" and stop blocking the state's request to put into effect the nation's first law requiring cuts in greenhouse gases from cars and trucks.

The Bush administration's decision is likely to be the single most important action it takes on global warming in the next two years. Eleven other states have adopted California's rules, and six more are considering it -- meaning the new regulations, if approved, could affect more than 40 percent of new vehicles sold in the United States.

California Attorney General Jerry Brown, at a hearing of environmental regulators Tuesday, accused the White House of conspiring with automakers and the oil industry to delay or deny the state's request to go forward.

"We know (Vice President Dick) Cheney and (President) Bush are oil men, they think like oil folks, and we know the more cars guzzle, the more oil they buy," Brown testified.

"We know the automobile companies are powerful. All we can say is, please deliver the message to the most important man of the hour -- Stephen Johnson, (administrator) of EPA -- please hear the voice of 30 percent of the American people because we need you and only you to stand up for what's right."

With Congress still far from agreement on climate-change legislation, California's standards represent the most significant cuts in greenhouse gas emissions being considered in the United States.

California would require automakers to reduce greenhouse gases in cars and light trucks by 25 percent and in larger trucks and sport utility vehicles by 18 percent. Automakers would have to begin installing new technologies by 2009, but would have until 2016 to meet the new standards.

But while California has long had special authority under the Clean Air Act to enact more stringent air pollution rules, it still needs the federal government's approval to do so in the form of a waiver of the national law.

Environmentalists and California officials are fully expecting a "no" from the EPA and the White House.

"The odds are zero to none," said Frank O'Donnell of Clean Air Watch, who predicts the administration will maintain that federal regulators are writing their own greenhouse gas rules. Bush said this month the new regulations will be released in late 2008, just months before he leaves office.

The EPA had delayed until Tuesday even scheduling a hearing on the state's push for a waiver, which the California Air Resources Board first requested in December 2005.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger pressed Johnson, the agency chief, at a private meeting in April: "Are you going to help California get its waiver?"

"I can't give you an answer right now," Johnson said, according to several participants in the meeting.

So now California is turning up the heat on Johnson and the White House. Schwarzenegger penned a scathing opinion piece in Monday's Washington Post with fellow Republican Gov. Jodi Rell of Connecticut that called on the federal environmental agency to "lead or step aside" on climate regulations.

Schwarzenegger already has threatened to sue the federal agency as soon as October if it does not grant the waiver. Brown said Tuesday he could file suit even sooner if the agency delays action.

Former Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills (Los Angeles County), who wrote California's vehicle emissions law, testified at the hearing that failing to grant the waiver would worsen the effects scientists say California could face from warming temperatures: a loss of snowpack that could reduce the state's water supply; more severe droughts and wildfires; increased smog and air pollution; and more heat waves and heat-related deaths.

"Please don't stand in our way," Pavley pleaded. "It's far too important."

California was backed at the hearing by officials from Connecticut, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Maine and Maryland as well as the American Lung Association and numerous environmental groups. The only person to speak out publicly against California's rules was a lobbyist for the auto industry.

"A patchwork of state-level fuel economy regulations as is now proposed by California is not simply unnecessary, it's patently counterproductive," said Steve Douglas, director of environmental affairs at the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, adding that the federal government should instead set national vehicle emissions standards.

The automakers are in court in Vermont, Rhode Island and California challenging the vehicle greenhouse gas limits. A decision is expected in the Vermont case within weeks.

The EPA traditionally has given California wide leeway to write its own air rules. The agency has never turned down a waiver request by California -- it has approved more than 50 waivers since 1968 -- but it has, at times, modified the state's regulations.

Federal law gives the agency only a few possible reasons for denying a waiver request, including a state's failure to show that rules are needed to meet "compelling and extraordinary conditions" or standards that are too costly to implement or do not give the industry enough time to install new technologies.

California Air Resources Board officials spent the hearing demonstrating how technologies to reduce greenhouse gases already exist but have not been used in much of the U.S. car and truck fleet. BMW's throttle-less engine, the Toyota Prius' integrated starter that turns off the engine during idle and Cadillac's cylinder deactivation at cruising speeds were cited as innovations that could be put to broader use.

The changes could add more than \$1,000 to the sticker price of some larger vehicles. But with gas prices nearing record highs of close to \$3.25 a gallon nationwide, the fuel-efficient technologies ultimately would save consumers money over the life of the vehicle, state officials said.

California officials noted that automakers had balked in the past at the state's strict air rules -- as well as regulations on seat belts and air bags -- but once passed, the industry met or exceeded the standards.

"As governor of California, we were in the same battle with the same companies" in the 1970s and early 1980s, Brown said. "They don't want to make the cars any more efficient than fits with their profit profile."

California urges EPA to change greenhouse gas rules

The state wants permission to impose tough new limits on emissions by cars and trucks.

By Joel Havemann and Johanna Neuman, Times Staff Writers

L.A. Times, Wednesday, May 23, 2007

WASHINGTON — California presented its case Tuesday for permission to impose tough new limits on greenhouse gas emissions by cars and trucks, pressing a campaign that state officials hope will set the stage for aggressive action nationwide on a major contributor to global warming.

The state called on the Environmental Protection Agency to end 16 months of delays on California's application for a waiver that would allow it to go beyond federal standards on vehicle emissions — chiefly carbon dioxide — whose complicity in climate change is now widely accepted.

The Bush administration has long viewed the issue with skepticism.

The EPA had argued that it did not have the power to regulate greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act because they were not pollution like the gases and particles that cause smog. The Supreme Court rejected that position in April, ruling that the agency had the authority to deal with greenhouse gases.

But the court did not order EPA to act, and President Bush earlier this month gave federal agencies until December 2008 to formulate positions on the issue — opening the possibility that federal action could be delayed until after he leaves office. And automakers, who object to states setting standards, have challenged California's move in federal court.

California, propelled by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican, took the lead in pushing for the right to act on its own, mandating reduced emissions by 2009. Other states were right behind. Eleven, concentrated in the Northeast, are seeking waivers from the EPA; Arizona and New Mexico are considering similar action.

Under the Clean Air Act, California is entitled to set stricter pollution standards than the federal government because of the severity of its air problems, but only if the EPA waives the provision that says federal standards supersede state requirements.

Supporting the state's position, California Atty. Gen. Edmund G. Brown Jr. told the EPA that "Congress has to allow California to blaze its own trail with a minimum of federal oversight."

State officials argued that California was capable of setting its own greenhouse standards for motor vehicles because it had successfully implemented many strict standards on other kinds of pollution.

In addition to pressing its case at the EPA administrative hearing Tuesday, the state lobbied for congressional support at a hearing by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which is led by California Sen. Barbara Boxer.

Fearful of having to meet different greenhouse gas standards in the 50 states, car makers put up the only organized opposition at the EPA hearing.

Steven Douglas, a representative of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said California cannot prove a link between global warming and carbon dioxide emissions by motor vehicles in the state. Global warming is a global problem, he said, and California could not prove that the state could solve it because there are so many other sources of greenhouse gases.

"Piecemeal regulations at the state level are not the way to go," Douglas told the three EPA officials who conducted the hearing.

Robert F. Sawyer, chairman of the California Air Resources Board, conceded outside the hearing room that California could not stop global warming by itself, but he said somebody in the United States had to take the first step. European countries have much tougher regulations in place than the U.S., he said, and even China's standards are in some respects stricter.

"We'd be delighted if somebody at the national level would institute a program like ours," he said.

The Senate committee hearing was more like political theater than the one at the EPA, as Brown charged that the Bush administration had shirked its duty to address global warming.

"It's typical of the head-in-the-sand approach that this administration has taken on issues related to climate change," he said. "This administration has too long hidden behind a wait-and-see approach as an excuse to do nothing. California isn't willing to 'wait and see' if the sea level will rise by one foot or 10, or if the Sierra snowpack will shrink by 10% or 50% or more. California will take action."

Brown told the committee that the legal case was strong and that California would prevail in the courts if it came to that. He lamented, however, that the court option would take another two years.

But Jonathan H. Adler, director of the Center for Business Law and Regulation at Case Western Reserve University School of Law, told the committee the EPA would have to reject the waiver request if it concluded that California's problem was not "compelling and extraordinary."

On smog, California could make that case. The problem with global warming, Adler said, is that "California's problem is not any different than Montana's ... or Israel's."

Adler also argued that California was pressuring a federal agency accustomed to a more deliberative pace. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) countered: "There is no reason for them to be hiding behind the skirts of bureaucratic delay." Whitehouse noted that Rhode Island was one of the original 13 states "and now one of the EPA 12, log-jammed in behind EPA's slow process."

Our quality of life

A survey taken in February shows that 87 percent of county residents like it here

By Felix Doligosa Jr., Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, May 22, 2007

Kern County may be dubbed the "armpit of California," but 87 percent of us like it here just fine. That's out of a new study commissioned by the transportation agency Kern Council of Governments, which involved asking 1,200 residents quality-of-life questions via phone in February. It was done by Kent Price of Price Research of Bakersfield and had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

People's perceptions of traffic congestion and their commutes varied, the random survey showed. Seventy-three percent of folks in valley areas including Arvin, Bakersfield, Shafter, Wasco and

Delano said congestion was a problem or major problem, while more than half of those in east Kern said it wasn't such a headache.

But only 8.1 percent called congestion during their commute a severe problem; slightly more than 17 percent said it was somewhat of a problem.

Kern residents also "overwhelmingly" approved of keeping the highway call box system, the survey showed, despite a 79.2 percent drop in call box usage since 1992. KernCOG administers call boxes.

KernCOG plans to conduct a similar survey every two years and use the results in crafting transportation plans. In this one, the Central Valley part of Kern had the most respondents at 600 while three other areas had 200 each.

"These results provide us with a snapshot of public sentiment today that can be measured and compared as time goes on," agency Executive Director Ron Brummett said in a written statement.

Among the survey findings:

- * 87 percent said their community was a desirable place to live.
- * 60 percent said things in their community were heading in the right direction.
- * Crime was the No. 1 issue of concern, followed by immigration and air pollution.
- * 45 percent reported their travel time to and from work each day was 20 minutes or shorter.
- * 62 percent said local governments should restrict future development to existing urban and suburban areas rather than expand into rural areas.
- * 76 percent want to see more public transportation options.
- * More than 40 percent agreed local governments have adequate funding for road and public transportation projects for population growth.
- * 66 percent disagreed that county roads are safe and adequate to handle the current population.
- * Crime was more of a serious problem for blacks and Hispanics than Asians and Caucasians.

What people said in their survey interviews

"We only have oil as the major source of revenue and someone needs to diversify and get new businesses to come in here."

"The single most important factor is that they are working on our dust problem. That will help the quality of life in our community in the next 10 years as well as solar and wind technology. This will help the people that have a hard time with PG&E."

"The single most important factor that will affect quality of life here for the next 10 years is adding more shops."

"I think incorporating the unincorporated areas will bring business to the area."

"Send the illegals back because they are taking over the place. It's like Tijuana."

Local farmers fume over possible chemical limits

By Chris Nichols

Lodi News Sentinel, Wednesday, May 23, 2007

Several area farmers are furious about proposed limits on the fumigants they rely on to keep their fruits and vegetables healthy.

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation last week outlined the new rules — which would cap the use of widely used chemicals like methyl bromide — as part of an overall effort to clean California's air.

Even before the proposal was released, several local agricultural leaders said the limits would be an unfair burden on their industry.

"The reality is it's going to make it more difficult to farm — and we're already competing in a global market," said Kyle Lerner, president of the Lodi District Grape Growers Association, following a speech by DPR Director Mary-Ann Warmerdam, held in Lodi late last month.

"It's potentially devastating," Lerner added.

Fumigants account for about 2 percent of the state's smog-making gases, called volatile organic compounds or VOCs, according to a statement released by the DPR. From May to October, however, they comprise 35 percent of the VOCs in the San Joaquin Valley area.

Gasoline emissions account for the vast majority of VOCs in California's air.

Chemicals that could be limited under state proposal:

- Methyl bromide
- Metam-sodium
- 1-3 Dichloropropene
- Chloropicrin
- Dazomet
- Metam-potassium
- Sodium tetrathiocarbonate

Source: Department of Pesticide Regulation.

DPR is under a federal court order to enforce a 20 percent reduction in pesticide VOCs, compared to 1991 levels. The rules must take effect by 2008.

The department estimates that the new rules could cost growers up to \$40 million per year to find alternate or "low-emission" ways to control pests.

Joe Peterson, a local cherry and grape grower, said continued restrictions on farming in the state will force many to get out of the business. He noted that foreign countries are already gaining on the U.S. ag industry because they do not have as many limits.

"Our biggest concern is: Are we playing on a level playing field?" Peterson said. "I don't think we want to become dependent on other countries for food, like we are with oil."

Fumigants are typically injected into the ground to kill soilborne pathogens, nematodes, insects and weeds before crops are planted. They're used on orchards, vineyards and more often on row crops, like tomatoes, carrots and peppers.

Under the proposed rules, growers would be required to hire a licensed fumigant specialist to inject the chemicals into the ground.

DPR would set a fumigant "cap," restricting how much can be used in the San Joaquin Valley, Ventura County and the state's southeast desert, all areas with high pesticide emissions.

Despite the concerns from other farmers, at least one local grower said he's not worried about the rules.

"Myself, I don't use any of those fumigants — I just rotate my crops," said Javier Toscano, who grows

everything from peppers to squash to tomatoes, off Kettleman Lane, east of Lodi.

He said his practice, in which he rotates crops from separate families on a regular basis, prevents the soilborne pests from ever forming and harming his produce.

Southland rail yard air risks to be topic

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Wednesday, May 23, 2007

New data about the potential health risks of living near Southern California's booming rail yards will be released in a series of meetings that begins tonight in Commerce.

A similar study in 2004 at the Roseville yard near Sacramento found that living within 300 feet of a busy Union Pacific rail yard increased the risk of cancer. Regulators also found that diesel exhaust from the yard blanketed a much larger area than expected, appearing to spread as far as eight miles downwind.

Some community groups are angry that state regulators declined to release results for the Los Angeles area rail yards before this week's meetings.

"This material is complex and technical. Presenting the draft results in person is the best way to introduce our work to community members," Michael Scheible, California Air Resources Board deputy executive officer, said in a statement.

Today's meeting is from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Commerce City Hall. Other meetings will be held Thursday in Los Angeles and in Mira Loma in Riverside County, and Friday in Wilmington. A full schedule is available at <http://www.arb.ca.gov/railyard/community/community.htm> .

Officials said there would be at least one more round of meetings in affected communities.

Mayor Plans an All-Hybrid Taxi Fleet

By Ray Rivera

N.Y Times, Wednesday, May 23, 2007

The spacious but gas-guzzling Ford Crown Victoria, long the emblematic vehicle of the city's yellow cab fleet, would be replaced by cleaner, more fuel-efficient hybrid vehicles under a five-year plan proposed by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg yesterday.

The move, which requires approval by the city's Taxi and Limousine Commission, is part of the mayor's ambitious environmental agenda for the city, PlaNYC, which calls for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2030.

"There's an awful lot of taxicabs on the streets of New York City obviously, so it makes a real big difference," Mayor Bloomberg said on NBC's "Today" show yesterday. "These cars just sit there in traffic sometimes, belching fumes. This does a lot less; it's a lot better for all of us."

Replacing the city's 13,000 yellow cabs, more than 90 percent of which are Crown Victorias, with hybrid vehicles would have the same impact on air quality as removing 32,000 privately owned vehicles from the road, the mayor said. Hybrids, which run on a combination of gasoline and electricity, emit less exhaust and are far more fuel-efficient; a hybrid Ford Escape, for instance, is rated at 34 miles per gallon in city driving.

Environmentalists have long complained about the poor gas mileage of the Crown Victoria, which gets 10 to 15 miles to the gallon in city traffic. But taxi owners and drivers say they like the vehicle's spaciousness, dependability and safety.

In the last two years the city has added about 375 hybrid vehicles to the yellow cab fleet, including models like the Toyota Prius sedan; Toyota Highlander Hybrid, a sport utility vehicle; and Ford Escape, another S.U.V.

Under the mayor's plan, that number would triple by October 2008 and would grow by about 20 percent each year after that.

While the plan does not specifically require that the new taxis be hybrids, it calls for all new vehicles entering the fleet beginning in October 2008 to get at least 25 miles to the gallon, rising to 30 miles to the gallon for cars entering the fleet the following year. City officials said the only vehicles that currently meet those fuel standards, as well as tougher emission standards that the mayor is proposing, are hybrids.

Mr. Bloomberg said the new regulations would have little impact on the city's cab owners, who by law are required to replace their vehicles every three to five years, depending on their use. The city's yellow cabs are privately owned but regulated by the Taxi and Limousine Commission, the head of which is appointed by the mayor.

He said the slightly higher cost of buying hybrid vehicles would be offset by the average \$10,000 a year owners would save in fuel costs.

The mayor's proposal for higher fuel standards was first reported in The Daily News yesterday.

PlaNYC initially called for converting the fleet within 10 years. But Mr. Bloomberg said City Councilman David Yassky, a longtime advocate of a greener taxi fleet, had persuaded him to cut that time in half.

The faster schedule, however, also reflects the mayor's desire to get as much of his PlaNYC carried out before he leaves office at the end of 2009, especially those elements that do not require state approval or financing.

"I've never liked to plan something and then have somebody else have the responsibility of doing it or paying for it," the mayor said yesterday.

The mayor and Mr. Yassky appeared together on the "Today" show and at a separate announcement at City Hall, flanked by 3 of 10 new hybrid Ford Escapes donated yesterday by Yahoo Inc. to a fleet operator, Team Systems.

"They gave us 10 cars, which they're paying for, which is a heck of an impetus for us to go ahead and say, 'Let's do it now,'" the mayor said.

Cabdrivers and owners had mixed feelings about the mandate yesterday.

"The trick is to balance passenger comfort and safety, for the both the passenger and the driver, with environmental concerns," Michael Woloz, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Taxicab Board of Trade, an industry group, said yesterday. "The stretch Crown Victoria has met all those needs."

Liaquat Janjma, 50, drives the night shift in a cab owned by a friend. Six months ago they switched from a Crown Victoria to a Toyota Highlander Hybrid, and the impact was immediate, saving him \$20 to \$50 a shift.

"The only bad thing is that repairs can be very, very expensive," he said.

Matthew W. Daus, chairman of the Taxi and Limousine Commission, said that even with higher maintenance costs, "when you add it all up, with the gas savings, it's going to mean more money in the drivers' pockets."

San Francisco, Boston and other cities have introduced hybrids into their taxi fleets, but New York City officials said the mayor's plan was believed to be the most extensive of any major city.

The officials said the new fleets would cut carbon dioxide emissions by 215,000 metric tons a year, just a small fraction of the 58.3 million metric tons the city produces each year.

Still, Kate Sindig, a senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the mayor's plan would "have real impacts, both in terms of air pollution and global warming gas emissions."

"It also sends a really powerful signal around the world," she added, "because New York is a city that is looked to around the world."

It's a secret

John Upton

Tracy Press, Wednesday, May 23, 2007

A judge said in a preliminary ruling that the e-mails a councilwoman sent to a government agency about an issue she would vote on are private. By John Upton

E-mails between government weapons researchers and Tracy Vice Mayor Suzanne Tucker may be legally withheld from the Tracy Press, according to a preliminary ruling issued Tuesday by a judge.

The ruling was issued Tuesday by Judge Lauren Thomasson, a former deputy city attorney with Stockton, in a lawsuit brought against the city by the Press, which is trying to obtain Tucker's and other city officials' e-mails with [Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory](#) under the California Public Records Act and Californian constitution.

The e-mails were regarding a biological laboratory and [explosives tests](#) proposed upwind from the city.

Tucker used a private e-mail address and a personal computer when she sent and received the e-mails, and she has said that she was e-mailing as a private citizen and not as a government agent.

The city's attorneys argued in pre-hearing testimony that the facts presented by the Press do not justify the legal action it has taken.

The City Council decided during a closed-door meeting in April to not hire outside counsel for the case.

Local Attorney Mark Connolly and San Francisco-based First Amendment lawyer Karl Olson are representing the Press.

"It's not what I would like," Connolly said Tuesday. "You always want the tentative ruling to go in your favor."

City spokesman Matt Robinson said officials would decide after today's hearing whether they would make a public statement about the case.

A hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m. today at Stockton Superior Court.

[Tracy Press, Guest Commentary, Wednesday, May 23, 2007](#)

Global warming is misinformation

A letter from Bob Hendricks

I would encourage Town Crier columnist Laura Hagler ("It's not easy being green," May 12) to educate herself more on the so-called global warming issue. A propaganda film put out by a failed presidential candidate with no background in environmental issues might not be the best starting point for an education. In the 1970s, the same crowd who is crowing about global warming was shrieking about a pending ice age. It was covered extensively in Newsweek magazine in April 1975. The purpose of this commentary is not to disparage Hagler, but to uncover and discuss other sources of information on the subject.

The Earth has been warming and cooling since the beginning of time. The largest contributor to temperature on our planet is, surprise, the sun. The sun does not burn at a constant temperature, and therefore any planet within the sun's influence is going to experience fluctuations in temperature as the sun warms and cools. Evidence shows that there is warming on Mars. And while 2 percent of Antarctica is experiencing warming, temperature readings across Antarctica have actually declined the past 35 years and the continent has experienced a net increase of snow mass in the past century.

The simple truth is that Al Gore and his ilk are charlatans who spread half-truths about environmental issues to spread their alarmist hysteria. For more informative reading, see "Global Warming: Fact, Fiction and Political Endgame," published by the Patriot Post. There is also an excellent documentary that counters Gore's horror show. It is called the "Great Global Warming Swindle." This documentary includes interviews with numerous scientists who peel away the rhetoric to get to the facts. There are plenty of real scientists who can study the data and review it without getting their hearts aflutter. This documentary demonstrates that the worldwide environmental movement is not an environmental movement, but a political one. So-called "disbelievers" are treated as heretics and "unenlightened fools." There is plenty of evidence to the contrary.

We humans, and Americans in particular, have to realize that we are not the cause of all of the world's ills. In fact, we are the good guys. Nobody has done more to reduce their emissions than Americans. Our latest attempts, for all of their good intentions, are causing more problems than the ones that they are supposed to solve. Take, for instance, ethanol. While burning ethanol will reduce emissions of certain pollutants from our automobiles, it will cause increases in others. Specifically, the emissions of the carcinogens benzene and butadiene are reduced while emissions of formaldehyde and acetaldehyde will increase. Burning E85 also increases ozone, which will create more smog. If the carcinogens and the smog are not bad enough, we cannot harvest enough corn to produce the volume of ethanol that would be needed if we wanted to switch completely. Already, corn prices have increased significantly. The price of corn will impact everything from our corn flakes in the morning to the feed that is used to raise livestock and poultry to put food on our table. One commentator recently stated that "we might be the first nation in the history of mankind to burn our own food supply." He's not too far off the mark.

In our own state, we have the California politburo, um, Legislature forcing restrictions on incandescent lighting. This ignores the problem that fluorescent lighting poses, namely the mercury that is in the fluorescent bulbs. There isn't an effective means for disposing of these bulbs, yet everyone will have to use them. This is akin to cutting off your nose to spite your face.

The bottom line is that there is plenty of information readily available, but not often reported that explains away much of the daily hysteria. We are all stewards of the environment and should not be reckless in the way that we treat it any more than we should be reckless in any other area. But take heart — lighting up the barbecue won't bring about Armageddon, either.

Bob Hendricks is a small businessman who has lived in Tracy since 1990.

[L.A. Times commentary, Wednesday, May 23, 2007:](#)

Climate commitment

Washington can improve vehicle efficiency and cut emissions – if it wants to.

By Ronald Brownstein

THERE'S SO MUCH talk about climate change in Washington these days that the hot air itself may be contributing to global warming. But two approaching decisions will test whether President Bush and the Democrat-led Congress can match their words with deeds. And on both fronts, the early evidence is emphatically mixed.

Each question revolves around pollution from cars and trucks, which account for about one-third of U.S. emissions of the gases, like carbon dioxide, linked to global warming. The most effective way to reduce those emissions is to improve automotive fuel efficiency. Squeezing more miles from a gallon of gasoline also would reduce America's reliance on foreign oil — which now provides about 60% of the U.S. supply, up from about 40% in 1990.

Incredibly, 1990 was the last time Washington required automakers to improve fuel efficiency for passenger cars. During the 1970s energy crisis, Congress mandated that automakers reach an average of 27.5 miles per gallon for their passenger cars by 1985. Unrelenting protests from the auto companies and the United Auto Workers led the Transportation Department to lower the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (or CAFE) standard in the late 1980s, before restoring the 27.5-mpg level in 1990. It hasn't budged since.

And because Americans buy so many sport utility vehicles and light trucks, which are allowed to meet lower standards, the average performance for *all* vehicles on the road is now just 25.4 mpg. That's less than in 1988. With manufacturers prizing performance above mileage, even passenger cars have improved only from 29 mpg in 1988 to 30 now. Don't spend the savings all in one place.

Over the last two decades, Democrats (starting with President Clinton) let this issue idle as much as the GOP did. But converging concerns about foreign oil, soaring gas prices and global warming are finally changing the equation. Even President Bush, who opposes economy-wide regulation of greenhouse gases, has called for improving fuel economy, most recently in a statement on global warming last week. Both the House and Senate could vote this year on legislation raising CAFE standards.

Those bills may be the most telling measure of Congress' commitment to serious action on climate change. The Senate Commerce Committee recently approved legislation setting a 35-mpg standard for all vehicles on the road by 2020, with 4% annual increases thereafter — reasonable goals similar to those Bush has embraced. The committee also followed a worthwhile Bush suggestion by restructuring the system to require separate improvements from both small and large vehicles. That removes the argument that tougher overall standards benefit Japanese manufacturers (because they primarily sell cars) over American companies more dependent on trucks.

But sponsors of the bill, including California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, reluctantly accepted a damaging loophole: In a provision known as the "off-ramp," they allowed the government to suspend the increases if it decides that the overall costs exceed the benefits. That tracks the weakest element of Bush's proposal. He has opposed legislation mandating specific targets and timetables for fuel economy, arguing that the president should retain flexibility to set future standards.

Flexibility sounds reasonable. But given the tireless opposition from the auto interests, providing future presidents that much discretion virtually assures that the most ambitious standards will never be met. As a tactic to avoid or defeat a filibuster from Senate opponents and move the bill forward, adding the "off-ramp" probably made sense. But if it survives in final legislation — if any — it's an indication Congress won't match its rhetoric on global warming with action.

While Congress deliberates, Bush is facing a more immediate test of words and actions on climate

change. After the Supreme Court ruled in April that the Environmental Protection Agency must regulate automotive greenhouse gas emissions (unless it could identify a compelling reason not to), Bush last week ordered the agency to begin drafting a rule. But he raised doubts about his sincerity and urgency by declaring that the process would last until he leaves office.

Still, there's a shortcut available. California has already passed legislation requiring cars to cut greenhouse gas emissions by nearly one-third, and 13 states have said they will follow — if the EPA, which must approve, provides California permission. The principal way auto manufacturers would meet that requirement is to improve fuel economy. And because the states involved account for about 40% of the market, the companies would probably have no choice but to engineer all their vehicles to the higher standard.

Yet until Tuesday, when hearings began on the rule, the EPA had shelved California's request for 18 months. If Bush genuinely wants to break Washington's gridlock on global warming and improve mileage, pushing the EPA to quickly give a green light to California offers his best chance to prove it.