

Fresno Westlands growers get some bad news District likely won't receive federal water deliveries this season.

By Robert Rodriguez

The Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2009

FIVE POINTS -- West Fresno County farmer Bob Diedrich hoped for good news during a standing-room-only meeting of Westlands Water District growers Wednesday.

But Diedrich, a farmer for 45 years, didn't like what he heard.

Westlands officials said growers in the district will likely receive no federal water deliveries this season.

"Our projections are that our allocations will be zero, absent a significant change in hydrology," said Tom Birmingham, general manager of the Westlands Water District in Fresno.

Farmers are heading into their third consecutive dry year.

Diedrich was one of about 100 crammed into a shop building at the district's west side office eager to hear details from district officials and Ron Milligan, operations manager for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

"What am I supposed to do, if I have no water?" Diedrich asked. "I have five guys that I employ year-round, and now I may have to tell them they don't have jobs."

Diedrich farms 960 acres that at one time grew processing tomatoes, dry beans, cotton and alfalfa. He is contemplating pulling up stakes temporarily and moving to Texas to live with his son.

"We are at the point where a lot of us farmers need to make some decisions today about whether we are going to plant this year," Diedrich said. "We don't want to just walk away from this."

Birmingham told growers that the district is working on options, including water transfers and accessing water that was not used as part of a water rationing program last year.

"We are literally looking all over the state to get water as quickly and inexpensively as possible," Birmingham said.

But none of those options is guaranteed.

Farmer and Westlands board President Jean Sagouspe sympathized with growers, saying he, too, is having to make tough decisions.

But Sagouspe also said the problem is not just the lack of rain and snow. He said environmental policies, including court-ordered pumping restrictions in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to protect endangered fish, have helped create this current crisis.

"People don't have a clue about what is going on," Sagouspe said. "The governor doesn't even care. He will only care when L.A. runs out of water."

Although the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation won't announce a water delivery forecast until Feb. 20, Milligan told growers several things are certain: Rainfall is below normal, the state reservoirs are depleted and the snowpack is small.

And the short-term weather outlook is not promising.

"We do not see a lot of water in the forecast," Milligan said. "And that will make it a very complicated operational season."

Westlands growers, who suffered the biggest hit among water districts on the west side of the Valley, are expected to have only about 300,000 acres in production this year, down from 500,000 acres that are farmed.

Birmingham said that while he hopes for a solution, he knows it may come too late for some growers.

"I pray that I am wrong," he said. "But the reality is that a lot of you in this room may not survive this."

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Big West refinery shutting down indefinitely

By JOHN COX, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Jan. 29, 2009

Big West announced Wednesday that its Rosedale Highway refinery will soon shut down indefinitely, a move that would likely mean mass layoffs and could foretell higher local gas prices and perhaps the plant's sale.

The planned closure results from the company's inability to secure an adequate supply of crude oil following last month's Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization filing by the refinery's Utah owner, Flying J Inc.

"For now, we will be winding down refining operations at the facility as we continue to explore opportunities," Big West Executive Vice President Fred Greener said in a news release.

"We hope that this suspension will be short-lived, and we are working very hard to find a solution that will allow resumption of operations," the statement continued. "However, at this time, we cannot predict when that might occur."

The release did not say when the wind-down would begin, and company spokesman Peter Hill declined to say when the plant would close.

The announcement stoked fears that the refinery might not soon recover from its troubles.

"That's scary," Henry Medina, president of Fleet Card Fuels, a Bakersfield fuel supplier, said of Wednesday's announcement. His company normally buys gasoline from Big West, but in recent weeks has been able to purchase only a relatively small amount of diesel from the refinery. The rest of its fuels now come from the Los Angeles and Fresno areas, he said.

Big West said it has contacted the union that represents many refinery employees regarding the plant's future. A company spokesman said the discussions with United Steelworkers Local 219 will focus on layoffs.

The refinery employs some 150 hourly workers, as many as 100 salaried employees and about 40 contracted laborers, union official Ed Huhn said.

According to a union labor contract, Huhn said, many of the plant's union-represented workers must be granted six months' notice — or the equivalent severance pay — upon announcement of the refinery's closure.

The news release was the company's first major communication regarding the refinery's future since Flying J's Dec. 22 bankruptcy filing.

In the meantime, however, some in the industry have speculated that the plant would soon close, and that this would mean a jump in gas prices by much as 20 cents a gallon because of added transportation costs.

"It's going to push prices up," Medina at Fleet Card said.

A spokeswoman for the state Energy Commission said prices would probably increase only slightly as other refiners adjust.

"I can tell you that Bakersfield will continue to receive gasoline and diesel products," spokeswoman Susanne Garfield said. "They'll be available from outside the area. (Fuel companies) will bring them in."

Bob van der Valk, a fuel analyst with 4 Refuel Inc. in Lynnwood, Wash., said the announcement clearly points to the refinery's sale.

Big West “is an albatross around (Flying J’s) neck,” he said, adding that the company made a mistake when it bought the refinery in 2005 because it does not produce oil for the plant, as did the plant’s previous owner, Shell Oil Co.

The shutdown is sure to impact local oil producers who used to — or in some cases still do — supply crude to the refinery. Many are owed large sums for shipments made prior to the bankruptcy filing, and they were hoping the refinery would negotiate a steady supply to get the refinery back to normal.

Former Big West supplier Chad Hathaway, an independent Bakersfield oil producer, said he was glad he found new buyers for his crude shortly after the bankruptcy filing.

Still, he was saddened to hear Wednesday’s announcement.

“I’m really worried about the people who work there,” he said. “There’s some good people.”

Big West recently came back online after a maintenance period of more than a week. Many said the maintenance was done earlier than planned because of the supply problems.

The state attorney general’s antitrust unit this month opened an investigation into accusations that Shell has intentionally contributed to the refinery’s troubles.

Chief Deputy Attorney General James M. Humes wrote in a letter last week to Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., saying that his staff will look into whether Shell has withheld oil shipments and closed a key pipeline into the refinery in order to bring about Big West’s closure.

Shell owns a refinery in the Bay Area that could benefit financially from an excess of oil on the market.

The company has denied the accusations, saying it hopes to work out a supply deal soon with Big West.

Refinery at a glance

1932: Refinery opens as Mohawk Oil Refinery.

1975: It’s purchased by Reserve Oil & Gas.

1980: Getty Oil takes over.

1984: Texaco buys it.

1998: Texaco and Shell agree to operate it as Equilon Enterprises LLC.

2001: The Federal Trade Commission requires Texaco to divest its interest following its merger with Chevron. Shell continues to operate it.

2003: Shell announces plans to shut it down.

2004: California attorney general urges Shell to sell, not close, it.

2005: It’s purchased by Flying J Inc. and operates under subsidiary Big West of California.

April 2007: Controversy breaks out over plans to expand the refinery and use a dangerous chemical. Big West later says it will use a safer form of the chemical. [The county fines the facility for venting gases into the air that made people sick.](#)

May 2007: County cancels public hearings on the expansion until the environmental report is reviewed by refinery experts.

October 2008: County approves the expansion, allowing work to begin as soon as January 2009.

December 2008: Flying J runs into financial trouble and files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Some oil producers, upset that they won’t be paid immediately for past deliveries to Big West, withhold their oil.

January 2009: Flying J says refining activity at Big West has been put on hold pending 10 days of maintenance work. Industry executives say the temporary halt to refining was forced by the plant's inability to purchase enough oil to operate normally. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., sends a letter to state Attorney General Edmund Brown Jr. airing allegations that Shell Oil Co. has withheld in order to shut the plant.

Sources: Big West of California, news archives

Study says truckers exposed to higher pollution risk

By Chris Bowman

Modesto Bee, Thursday, January 29, 2009

Odds of dying from heart disease are nearly 50 percent higher among truck drivers than the general U.S. population, according to a new Harvard University study that suggests diesel exhaust is mostly likely to blame.

The study is the largest health assessment yet conducted on effects of vehicle emissions on workers in the trucking industry, according to the California Air Resources Board, which regulates diesel exhaust as a cancer-causing agent.

Harvard Medical School researchers said they examined workplace and medical histories of more than 54,000 unionized employees who had worked for one of four national trucking companies from 1985 through 2000. The findings are important not only for the trucking industry but for people who commute in heavy diesel-fueled traffic or who live or work near truck stops, ports and other transportation hubs, state air board officials said.

California pollution regulators presented the study to directors of the state air board last week, as further evidence of risks of diesel exposure and the need to tighten limits on diesel emissions from all sources.

But the regulators also cited gains in controlling the pollutant, shown by results of a recent Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory study: Diesel soot in the San Francisco Bay Area has dropped nearly 18-fold in the past 40 years, even as overall fuel consumption nearly tripled.

"This reduction in...diesel engine soot is due in large part to (state) and federal regulations and enforcement programs," said a report by air resources board staffers.

Gore testifies that U.S. must act quickly to reduce carbon emissions

By RENEE SCHOOF - McClatchy Newspapers

Sacramento Bee, Tri-Valley Herald and Modesto Bee, Wednesday, January 28, 2009

WASHINGTON -- New scientific studies - including one released this week - add urgency to the need to reduce carbon emissions, but the United States can do it in a way that strengthens American economic prosperity and national security, former Vice President Al Gore told a Senate committee Wednesday.

Gore called on Congress to pass President Barack Obama's economic stimulus package because it contains billions of dollars for energy efficiency, renewable energy, an improved national electricity grid and cleaner transportation, which add up to large reductions in carbon dioxide emissions.

Gore, who won a Nobel Peace Prize for helping the public understand global warming, brought the Senate Foreign Relations Committee up to speed using his trademark slides and short videos. He also urged the U.S. to take three steps: Pass the stimulus plan with its big boost for clean electricity, then pass a law to put a price on carbon emissions and limit them, and then lead all countries to agree to binding reductions under a new treaty - all by the end of this year.

"The scientists are practically screaming from the rooftops. This is a planetary emergency. It's outside the scale we're used to dealing with," Gore told the senators.

Bold action is needed because the climate that makes human civilization possible is at risk, and decisions about whether to burn more fossil fuel now will have an impact on Earth's climate far into the future, he said.

One of the examples of new evidence Gore mentioned was a report by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientist Susan Solomon that concluded that changes in temperature, rainfall and sea level are largely irreversible for more than 1,000 years after carbon dioxide emissions stop completely.

Heat-trapping carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, mainly from the burning of fossil fuels, have caused the Earth's temperature to increase in recent decades, and scientists say that the average global surface temperature could rise by up to another 11 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century if carbon emissions continue unchecked. Carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for centuries, and about 20 percent of it remains for thousands of years.

Solomon's study with Swiss and French partners looked at the consequences of letting carbon dioxide build up in the atmosphere above the current level during this century and then completely halting emissions. It found evidence that there'd be decreases in rainfall comparable to the 1930s Dust Bowl in North America and many other parts of the world that would last for hundreds of years, and that a gradual rise in the sea level over 1,000 years would be locked in.

Solomon said in a statement this week that the study "convinced us that current choices regarding carbon dioxide emissions will have legacies that will irreversibly change the planet."

"It's a sobering warning that the quicker we reduce emissions the better," Gore said when he told senators about Solomon's report and other recent findings, but he added that there was no reason to fear doom or to make what he called a false choice between "our planet and our way of life."

"In fact, the solutions to the climate crisis are the very same solutions that will address our economic and national security crises as well," he said, arguing that renewable energy - sun, wind and geothermal - will create jobs and reduce dependence on oil-powered regimes.

Gore got a friendly reception from Democrats and Republicans alike. None challenged his scientific assessment. Gore at one point noted that he was encouraged when he spoke about warming in Antarctica by nods of agreement from Robert Corell, a climate scientist and oceanographer at The Heinz Center for Science, Economics and the Environment, who was sitting nearby.

Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., thanked Gore for an informative talk and said he'd never missed one of Gore's presentations.

Isakson asked Gore several questions about nuclear energy and suggested that the federal government could help set up ways to improve the system for financing nuclear power plants.

Gore told Isakson that he agreed that nuclear power should be considered, but that he didn't think there was interest from private investors because of the high costs of nuclear plants.

Sen. Bob Corker, a Republican from Gore's home state of Tennessee, also thanked Gore for an "excellent meeting." Corker and Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., recently studied the European experience with carbon trading.

Corker said he expected that climate legislation putting a price on carbon emissions was likely this year - "We're now firing with real bullets," he said - and that he wanted to help craft the bill. He argued that all revenue from the sale of emissions credits should be returned to the American people to make up for higher energy costs.

Gore agreed that significant funds should be returned to taxpayers, but said that some money also should go to other needs, such as expanding renewable energy.

The hearing on climate change was the first meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee under the new chairmanship of Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., reflecting Kerry's long-standing interest in global warming science and policy.

The House of Representatives passed the Obama stimulus bill 244-188 Wednesday evening. It now goes to the Senate.

Gore Urges Cap on Carbon Emissions, Global Climate Pact He Tells Senators the Situation Is Dire

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post, LA Times, Thursday, January 29, 2009

Former vice president Al Gore urged lawmakers yesterday to adopt a binding carbon cap and push for a new international climate pact by the end of this year in order to avert catastrophic global warming.

Appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Gore delivered a short slide show that amounted to an update of his Oscar-winning documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," lecturing some of his former colleagues that even if the world halted greenhouse gas emissions now, the world could experience a temperature rise of 2.5 to 7.5 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100.

"This would bring a screeching halt to human civilization and threaten the fabric of life everywhere on the Earth, and this is within this century," Gore said.

The high-tech display included a graphic illustration of how the Arctic's permanent summer ice cover has melted in recent decades, a pulsating image the Nobel Peace Prize winner described as "30 years in less than 30 seconds," and a short video clip of a scientist who ignited the methane gas seeping out of the melting Arctic permafrost.

After the audience watched the flames leap up and the researcher scurry away, Gore remarked: "She's okay. The question is, are we?"

Gore received a largely sympathetic hearing from the panel.

"Frankly, the science is screaming at us," said the committee's chairman, John F. Kerry (D-Mass.), who added that the United States would not make the mistake of leaving emerging economies out of any future climate agreement.

"A global problem demands a global effort, and today we are working toward a solution with a role for developed and developing countries alike, which will be vital as we work to build consensus here at home in tough economic times," Kerry said.

Gore did not sugarcoat his message to senators. While politicians including President Obama have touted the importance of exploring "clean coal technology," the former vice president said it will not be available for years: "We must avoid becoming vulnerable to the illusion that this is near at hand. It is not."

Sen. Richard G. Lugar (Ind.), the committee's top Republican, asked Gore to draw on his experience as "a practical politician" to explain how senators could muster a broad bipartisan majority for any international treaty that could come out of the Copenhagen climate conference at the end of the year.

After distancing himself from his political past -- "I'm a recovering politician. I'm on about Step 9" - Gore said the chances of a treaty passing the Senate should be boosted by developing countries' willingness to embrace binding climate goals, coupled with the new scientific evidence of recent warming and Obama's leadership.

Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), who supports a carbon tax rather than a cap-and-trade system, said he thinks the only way to construct a bipartisan coalition on climate change is to be honest about what it means to curb greenhouse gas emissions. "I think we can build consensus around transparency," Corker said, adding that when it comes to addressing global warming, "we're really talking about increasing the price of carbon."

Corker said that even lawmakers who have some reservations about a carbon cap's economic impact need to acknowledge it will likely become reality.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, Jan. 29, 2009:](#)

Higher density gains momentum

Majority at urban planning forum support most far-reaching scenario.

Change is hard to contemplate for most of us, but sometimes the argument is so compelling, we take the plunge. That's what happened at a public forum on the future of urban planning in the Valley in Fresno on Monday.

At the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Project's public summit, about 53% of the nearly 600 people in attendance choose the most far-reaching scenario as their recommendation for adoption by officials in each of the eight Valley counties. That's a hopeful and gratifying commitment.

The choices posed at the summit recommended urban densities -- the average number of people and homes permitted per acre. Currently, the Valley average is about 13 people, or four homes, per acre. The attendees at the summit chose the highest density among several choices -- 31 people per acre, or about 10 homes -- as the goal for the Valley by 2050.

That sounds like a lot -- and it is, set against the pattern of sprawling suburbs that has characterized the Valley for decades. But it isn't that much compared to cities all over North America.

Moreover, there are compelling reasons why the status quo in development is no longer sustainable.

Sprawl erodes the capacity of agriculture, the Valley's economic base, by paving over productive farmland.

It exacerbates traffic congestion by imposing longer commutes on increasingly crowded roads and highways.

All that traffic further pollutes the Valley's air.

It makes public services such as safety, water and sewer more costly at a time when we cannot afford those costs.

It ignores growing demand for a more urban lifestyle among many.

Increasing urban densities doesn't mean packing people cheek-by-jowl in sardine-can urban slums. Modern urban apartment and condominium designs are attractive and comfortable for a wide range of consumers, from young professionals who want to be close to jobs, recreation and entertainment, to retired empty-nesters who want to move down in home size, but still want services and amenities nearby.

Ed Thompson, state director for American Farmland Trust, put it this way Monday: "Once people get over the fact that this doesn't mean 20 stories of gulag blocks, there will be great support."

That support will be needed. The next step in the blueprint process is submitting the summit's consensus to a panel comprising two elected officials from each of the eight Valley counties. Getting them to look past the status quo will be difficult. Many county leaders up and down the Valley have already expressed their skepticism about what looks to them like radical change.

But it isn't radical. Whatever standard is adopted in the blueprint won't be binding on counties -- though it could be tied to state transportation funds in the future.

And we're talking about an average here. Urban development in downtown Fresno, for instance, could yield densities far greater than 31 people per acre -- leaving the rest of the county with room to develop at lower levels.

In any case, the age of sprawl is over. Increased densities are inevitable. Our goal should be to make them happen in as smooth and appealing a fashion as possible. We should plan our way into that future rather than stumble into it.

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Thursday, Jan. 29, 2009:](#)

New tailpipe standards were overdue

Californians should cheer President Obama's order this week that moves the state closer to setting tougher limits on pollutants spewed from the tailpipes of new vehicles sold in California.

Last year, the Bush administration blocked California's air cleanup initiative directed toward automobile emissions. The nation's automakers also filed a lawsuit to block California from requiring cleaner-burning and more fuel-efficient cars.

Obama's order directs the federal Environmental Protection Agency to consider California's request to begin a state program aimed at cutting auto emissions tied to global warming by 30 percent by 2016. California has been joined by 17 other states that said they will follow California's rules if enacted.

Automakers claim the rules will increase costs when the industry already is on such shaky financial ground that the government has been compelled to pledge \$17.4 billion in federal "bailout" loans to keep plant doors open.

Environmentalists and other supporters of a waiver allowing California to adopt tougher pollution rules for new vehicles sold in the state contend automakers have been stalling necessary changes.

Automakers and environmentalists are both right. If California is allowed to adopt tougher vehicle pollution rules, likely it will lead the way for the rest of the nation. Automakers' costs will be huge.

A final decision by the EPA is several months away. If the agency grants California's request, it will require automakers to produce cleaner-burning vehicles to sell in states with tougher emission rules.

But a 2007 U.S. Supreme Court ruling will first require the Obama administration to determine if greenhouse-gas emissions those targeted by California's tougher tailpipe limits endanger public health or welfare, which is the legal threshold under the federal Clean Air Act for regulating greenhouse-gas emissions.

Automakers and the Bush administration should have been more proactive years ago. If they hadn't stonewalled demands for more fuel-efficient and pollution-reducing vehicles, automakers would be better positioned to weather today's bleak economy. Consumers' demand for American-made vehicles would have rivaled or surpassed their demand for foreign vehicles.

All that is so much water under the bridge. Financially distressed American automakers now are dealing with a new president who campaigned to support such cleanup initiatives as California's.

The strings tied to the \$17.4 billion in loans pledged to GM and Chrysler last month under the Bush administration's watch give President Obama the leverage to force cleanup initiatives on automakers. California's and the nation's air quality, and people's health, will benefit from reducing pollutants spewed from tailpipes.

But Obama and Californians must not ignore today's financial realities. Tougher pollution standards and the need to change American manufacturing processes come at a high cost. They come at a time when the dollars to cover costs are not there.

Realistic deadlines and financial incentives that means federal financial help will be required to help automakers meet tougher emission standards.

We are encouraged by automakers' muted response to Obama's action this week.

"We are ready to work with the administration on developing a national approach," Dave McCurdy of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers told *The Sacramento Bee*.

Too bad that promised cooperation wasn't in evidence almost a decade ago.

[L.A. Times commentary, Thursday, Jan. 29, 2009:](#)

California's EPA waiver

With a push from Obama, the state's effort to regulate greenhouse gases may finally bear fruit.

By Judith Lewis

Fran Pavley was one week into her term in the California Assembly in 2001 when she took up the cause of two environmental organizations -- the Bluewater Network and the Sierra Club -- and pioneered a landmark law to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases from the tailpipes of cars and trucks. Within 18 months, the bill had cleared the Legislature; in 2002, it was signed into law by the governor. Environmental leaders applauded the state for making the first national foray into regulating pollutants that cause climate change; state regulators swiftly drew up the rules to meet the law's requirements.

And then, for seven years, the Bush administration dragged its feet, ultimately denying California the right to enforce Pavley's law.

With President Obama's announcement Monday that the Environmental Protection Agency will reconsider that decision, Pavley's long battle to implement the law she wrote may finally be over. And that's a good thing, not just for California but for the country.

California, with its peculiar geography and heavy reliance on motor vehicles, has always led the nation in cleaning up the air. In 1967, California passed the Mulford-Carrell Act, establishing a state agency to monitor air quality and regulate motor vehicle emissions. Three years later, President Nixon -- a Californian -- created the EPA. And it was the California Air Resources Board's "technology-forcing regulation" in 1970 that inspired a miraculous invention called the catalytic converter, which turns carbon monoxide and smog-forming nitrogen oxides into harmless gases. Once automakers began installing them to meet California's emissions requirements, they became standard across the country.

California has not been the only innovating state on environmental law -- New Jersey was the first to force airlines to reduce emissions from jet engines; Minnesota in the early 1970s required its sole nuclear power plant to release far less radioactivity than federal law allowed. But no state rivals California when it comes to fighting smog. In a series of famous hearings on air pollution led by Sen. Edmund Muskie in 1970, nearly every speaker invoked California's example, often with passion. "The Congress of the United States must untie our hands!" demanded Herbert Fineman, the speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, and "authorize [the federal government] to issue motor-vehicle emission standards that are as stringent as the state of California's."

Until George W. Bush was elected, California was consistently granted permission to enact more rigorous anti-pollution statutes than those of the federal government. Over the last 40 years, the agency denied the state the right to set its own rules only once -- in December 2007, when then-EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson refused to grant the state a waiver to enforce Pavley's greenhouse gas law.

Johnson said he denied the waiver because new fuel-efficiency standards in the 2007 federal energy bill would accomplish the same end. Of course, that was ridiculous. California's law requires a 30% reduction in greenhouse gases from tailpipes by 2016, and the energy bill's rules don't even kick in until 2020 (not to mention that they say nothing about methane, carbon dioxide or halogenated gases that cause global warming).

But by equating California's new tailpipe emissions law with mileage standards, Johnson was signaling the administration's allegiance to the auto industry, whose lobbyists had argued that California's greenhouse gas law was in fact a thinly disguised fuel-efficiency standard, which the state had no authority to set. What's more, said Dave McCurdy, president of the Alliance of

Automobile Manufacturers, California's law would put in place "a patchwork quilt" of regulations, causing confusion in the already beleaguered auto industry.

In his speech Monday, Obama, tellingly, referred to a "patchwork" too. But by using the metaphor to the opposite effect, he stood firmly on California's side. The EPA's denial of California's waiver, he said, "risks the creation of a confusing and patchwork set of standards that hurts the environment and the auto industry."

With that language, he affirmed what Pavley had known from the start: As California goes, so goes the country -- and even the world. According to the state Air Resources Board, 71% of the world's population lives in countries with vehicle emissions standards modeled on California's. If the new EPA administrator, Lisa Jackson, grants California's latest waiver, 40% of the country will be driving cars that emit fewer greenhouse gases from their tailpipes, and other states are likely to follow the lead.

Nearly 80 years ago, in the depths of an earlier economic crisis, Justice Louis Brandeis remarked that "it is one of the happy incidents of the federal system that a single courageous state may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory, and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country."

Brandeis was opining about the right of a state to regulate who can make and sell ice. But he might as well have been talking about California's right to rid itself of smog. As one brave and idealistic legislator recognized in 2001, when it comes to saving the planet from pollution, only a state can change the world.

Judith Lewis is an environmental journalist and contributing editor to High Country News.

[L.A. Daily News Editorial, Thursday, January 29, 2009:](#)

Clean air act: Feds finally get out of state's way

California led the way for years on vehicle emissions and mileage standards, setting goals that both Detroit and international automakers sometimes moaned about - but were always somehow able to reach.

Those regulations aimed at significantly clearing our air not only did just that, they saved thousands of lives, and continue to do so.

Over-regulation can be as harmful as the reverse. But California, through both Republican and Democratic administrations over many decades, has been proud of leading the regulatory fight against air pollution and the wasting of fuel. More than a dozen states have followed our lead and automatically adopt the same standards we do when new ones are passed.

But in 2007, when California applied for the waivers it has long received from the federal Environmental Protection Agency to act on its own in setting tough, new standards, the Bush administration turned down the request, saying the current national standards were fine and the move was unnecessary.

Whatever happened to conservative championing of states' rights - in this case, the 14 states including our own that sought to enact clean-air, greenhouse-gas-reducing standards that would continue our national progress toward energy independence?

Clearly, the fix was in. The argument promoted by the auto industry - that it would have to build two sets of vehicles, one version with good gas mileage and fewer tailpipe emissions, the other gas guzzlers as usual - was empty.

Now that the Obama administration has swiftly moved to allow California to set the new standards, there has been very little bellowing out of Detroit.

Automakers already know that consumers want lower-polluting, higher-mileage vehicles. They can hardly bellyache about how these new regulations would put people out of work and harm their business models. The kinds of cars automakers have been producing for years now - combined with a bad economy - have already done a very good job of putting auto workers on the

unemployment lines. Make something their bosses could quite rightly tout as lean and green and, once the economy does recover, Americans are quite likely to start buying them again.

We understand that the manufacturers would naturally like to see one national standard for all its products.

Fine - just let California lead the way in setting it. We believe that having to hit new tailpipe targets will very likely help Detroit out of its slump, not hurt it. Once Americans get back into the car-buying mood, knowing that gas prices in the long run aren't heading anywhere but up, the Big Three will be offering cars and light trucks we actually want to buy.

[Stockton Record Editorial, Wednesday, January 28, 2009](#)

Greener administration?

EPA should rescind Bush-era rule blocking California emissions standards

California may get to regulate greenhouse gases coming from automobiles after all.

President Barack Obama on Monday ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to review a Bush administration decision to block emission standards in California that are more stringent than federal standards.

The argument, supported by the auto industry, is that the nation should have one standard. But California started regulating tailpipe emissions before the federal government, and its standards have always been tougher than the national standards. The Clean Air Act allows state regulation because the state started earlier, but it still takes a waiver - approved many times before - from the federal government. If the new waiver is granted, any state will be allowed to adopt the California standard; 13 states already have, and others are considering it.

Denial of the waiver last year set off a storm of lawsuits, including one from California, demanding that it be allowed, as it always has been, to regulate air emissions. Many saw the Bush administration's decision as cowering to the auto industry, an industry now shell-shocked by the swooning economy.

A law passed by Congress in 2007 requires that by 2020, new cars and trucks meet a standard of 35 miles per gallon, a 40 percent increase over the status quo. But the Bush administration did not set regulations in support of that law. That looked to many like the foot-dragging it was.

To be sure, the auto industry is in terrible shape. Sales are down. Plants are closing. Jobs are being lost.

But the taxpayers have anted up billions and billions of dollars to bail the industry out. We should demand that part of that public larder be used to address issues of public concern, fuel economy and emissions issues.

And California and any other state that wants to put teeth in that demand should be allowed to do just that.

[Manteca Bulletin Commentary Wed., Jan. 28, 2009](#)

A true breath of fresh air from Washington

By Dennis Wyatt, Managing Editor

Thank you, President Obama.

One of the most insane stances of the Bush Administration was the blocking of California's attempt to reduce greenhouse emissions by 30 percent by 2020. To reach that goal, the language of Assembly Bill 32 requires vehicles produced for California to average 35.7 miles per gallon. It is a far cry from the current federal standard of 22.3 mpg for light trucks and SUVs and 27.5 mpg for cars.

Yet the Bush Administration was still holding a big stick over the Central Valley - particularly the San Joaquin Valley - that it had to lower its air pollution by 2015 or risk losing all federal

transportation money. And for the record, the North America Free Trade Agreement folks never saw anything ironic about allowing Mexico the right to send trucks as far north as Fresno after fueling before crossing the border with some of the dirtiest diesel on the planet while California truckers have to burn cleaner and more expensive diesel plus replace their engines.

Air quality has improved in California. All it takes, though, is to drive south toward Bakersfield on a stagnant day to realize we still have a long way to go. You can't see the foothills 10 miles away. People are being forced to breathe that air. A lot of what ends up down there started in San Francisco and was blown across the Altamont. We contribute to the problem in Bakersfield as well. The only way to reduce it significantly is for everyone in California to spew fewer emissions per mile driven.

Besides, since we are saddling the next generation or so with the Mother of All Debt to cover the follies of our greedy behavior the very least we can do is make sure they have some air left to breathe.

There are those who argue such a tough standard is the equivalent of the death knell for the auto industry. Hogwash. California represents just over a tenth of the new car market in this country. Thirteen other states are pursuing tougher standards similar to California's but were blocked by the federal government. It includes some heavy hitters such as New York, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Washington. Rest assured that probably represents close to a third of the market for vehicles sold in this country. That is a pretty big demand you can't ignore.

It wasn't too long ago that General Motors and Chrysler were dismissing hybrids as ineffective stop-gap measures to increase fuel efficiency because they claimed there was no market for them. Ford saw it differently.

I was fully aware when I bought my 2005 Ford Escape hybrid I was paying over \$4,000 more than I was for the comparable all gas fueled four-cylinder version. People told me I wasn't smart as I'd never retrieve it in the gas I'd save over the life of the car noting it would have to hit \$4 a gallon to pencil out. Those same doubters, by the way, now think I was a genius for buying when I did and two of them have told me they want first shot at buying the Escape if I ever sell.

I bought the Escape hybrid because I was impressed with Ford's quality – equal or better than Japanese manufacturers that were offering hybrids – and the fact I wanted to reduce my carbon footprint.

We shouldn't always be driven by the bottom line. We all have a stewardship when it comes to this planet and future generations. Some do it by driving hybrids; others do it in other ways. The bigger the demand gets for hybrids or other technology the lower the per unit cost gets.

Hybrids are perfect for people who do mostly local driving as mileage and gas savings soar and emissions drop. Colder weather has dropped the overall mileage I get to about 27.5 miles per gallon but when the daytime temperatures are 70 degrees or better I average just a tad less than 33 miles per gallon.

The only thing at the moment that would get me out of my hybrid is a plug-in hybrid. It comes down to making a cost-effective storage battery for electricity. If what they are saying happens, though, 75 miles on a charge would mean I'd rarely have to use the gas engine during the course of a year. Even if the cost was \$6,000 to \$7,500 more based on projections that the electrical charges would cost, it would make sense for someone with my driving habits.

I'd virtually have a vehicle that would have a gas engine that maybe gets 1,000 miles on it a year while the batteries take care of the other 11,000 miles. Plus I wouldn't be limited by all electric cars as I have a gas engine to fall back on for longer trips.

Obama gets full credit on this one for letting the people who have to deal with the real problems such as California leaders to do what has to be done to improve the quality of life today and for future generations.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Al Gore says that US should take protagonist role in environmental issues. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Al Gore: EEUU debe retomar protagonismo en asuntos ambientales

El ex vicepresidente estadounidense Al Gore instó a los legisladores el miércoles a apoyar el plan de rescate económico del presidente Barack Obama y a tomar rápidamente medidas para limitar las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero, causantes del calentamiento global.

Terra, Thursday, January 29, 2009

"Para impulsar nuestra economía, recuperar el liderazgo económico y moral en el mundo y recuperar el control de nuestro destino, debemos tomar acciones audaces ahora", dijo Gore ante el Comité de Relaciones Exteriores del Senado.

El premio Nobel de la Paz, quien también ganó un Oscar por su documental "An Inconvenient Truth" (Una verdad incómoda, 2006) sobre el calentamiento del planeta, dijo que Washington debe tener una posición de liderazgo en el tema, de cara a una cumbre de la ONU que se celebrará en Copenhague a fin de año para discutir el cambio climático.

Si el Congreso "actúa enseguida" para aprobar el paquete de estímulo económico por 825.000 millones de dólares propuesto por Obama y "toma acciones decisivas este año" para limitar las emisiones de carbono, la delegación estadounidense en la capital danesa tendrá "una autoridad renovada para liderar el mundo en el delineamiento de un tratado justo y efectivo", dijo Gore.

"Este tratado debe negociarse este año. No el año próximo. Este año", advirtió.

Gore elogió el plan de rescate de Obama, que incluye ítems favorables al medioambiente, como inversiones en eficiencia energética, energía renovable e impulsos para la fabricación de vehículos "verdes".

El gobierno de Obama empezó el lunes a delinear su prometida política medioambiental con la designación de un experto para asuntos de cambio climático y nuevas medidas que buscan reducir las emisiones de gases contaminantes.

La comunidad internacional se reunirá a fines del año en Copenhague para poner a punto un tratado que determinará los esfuerzos que habrá de realizar cada país, industrializados y en desarrollo, para reducir sus emisiones contaminantes después de 2012, fecha en que expira el Protocolo de Kioto.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses snow caps are affected primarily by smog emissions.

Los mantos de nieve, afectados principalmente por emisiones de smog

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, January 29, 2009

Un estudio de la Universidad de California en Irvine determinó que las llamadas partículas finas de la contaminación del aire hacen que la nieve en las montañas en esta época del año se derrita más rápidamente. El estudio, a publicarse en febrero en el *Journal* de Investigaciones Atmosféricas y Geofísicas dice que la contaminación ensucia la nieve al cubrirla y la derrite a mayor velocidad que antes. El fenómeno se observa en las sierras nevadas y en las montañas más altas. Charles Zender, investigador, dijo que el tipo de contaminación que afecta los mantos de nieve es principalmente de automóviles.