

TESTIMONY
OF
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PRESIDENT PRO TEM
CALIFORNIA STATE SENATE
BEFORE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC WORKS
UNITED STATES SENATE
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STATE, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES
ON
GLOBAL WARMING

Testimony of California State Senator Don Perata
Before the Environment and Public Works Committee
United States Senate

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Madame Chair and Distinguished Senators:

Thank you for holding this hearing, and for the privilege of addressing the committee.

I'm honored to be here with my fellow Californian, Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, and Mayor Nickels, both of whom are national leaders in the fight against global warming.

I'm not a climate scientist or a resource economist—I'm a former school teacher, a native Californian and—like all of you—an elected official who worries about what kind of world we're leaving our kids and grandkids.

Today, I want to make three points to the committee:

First, California can serve as a model for federal efforts to combat global warming and its impacts.

Last year we passed two very important laws: one prohibiting utilities from entering into long-term contracts for power produced by dirty coal-burning plants,

and another setting a target to reduce the state's total greenhouse gas emissions over time.

The latter measure, known as AB 32, has received plenty of attention. It's a good law authored by Mr. Núñez. The best thing about it is it commits the state to reining in its greenhouse gas emissions. Many of the details of how to do this must be worked out, but we're on the right track.

The other law is one I wrote to promote cleaner coal technologies. I'm glad to see that the Chairwoman of this committee has included provisions of that measure in her bill.

There are more than 30 new coal plants proposed in the Western United States, and 150 for the nation as a whole. California is a big customer for the electricity from those plants.

Taken together, those plants could produce up to 120 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions; by contrast, the total emissions from all sources in the entire state of Oregon is about 70 million tons.

California enacted SB 1368 to send a strong signal to the western energy markets. Our energy must be clean – we won't buy power from coal plants spewing greenhouse gases by the ton.

To be clear, California has not said "no" to coal; rather, we've said that we want cleaner coal plants that can provide us energy without producing massive global warming pollution.

Similar measures to SB 1368 are being considered in the Oregon and Washington legislatures. While it's gratifying to know that other states are following California's lead, there is no substitute for a national policy.

So I encourage all of you to move forward with the Chairwoman's legislation.

Now, what we have done in California is much more than just pass two landmark bills.

Climate change and its dramatic effects are front page news today. But long before global warming began grabbing headlines, California worked to protect the environment and reduce air pollution.

California has led a quiet revolution for decades to achieve one of the lowest per capita carbon emissions rate in the country. Over the years, state lawmakers have boosted energy efficiency, increased the diversity of our energy sources and improved our air quality.

It was in fact Governor Ronald Reagan who signed the state's first major energy efficiency law in 1974, in the wake of America's first foreign oil scare.

Today, the same energy efficiency programs created 30 years ago serve as a cornerstone of California's efforts to reduce greenhouse gases.

By 2008, our state's energy efficiency programs will reduce carbon dioxide emissions – a major cause of global warming – by more than 3 million tons per year. That's the equivalent to taking 650,000 polluting cars off the road.

And since the cheapest kilowatt of electricity is the one not used, it will save Californians millions of dollars on their monthly utility bills.

In California, we're proud to be trendsetters. And much of what we've done could easily be adapted at the national level.

That brings me to my second point: We need your leadership to win this battle. Only with your help can we transform our current fossil-fuel based economy into the new energy economy needed in the 21st century.

As you know, there are many things a state like California can do for itself, and there are many things it cannot.

The challenge before you is to craft federal legislation that helps bend the curve, as California is doing, so that overall U.S. climate change emissions begin to head downward.

That demands the same comprehensive approach taken by California to cover all major sources of global warming pollution – not a piecemeal plan affecting only one set of emission sources, one type of emissions, or one type of mechanism to achieve reductions.

It means direct and measurable emission reductions, flexible financial and tax incentives, and addressing more than just carbon dioxide.

We also need Congress to provide tools, such as a 10-year extension of the renewable production and investment tax credit. The uncertainty over this important incentive is a big problem for new renewable energy investments.

And finally, we must have Washington's leadership to get off what the President has called "our national addiction to oil." We can do this through more efficient cars, clean alternative fuels and better transportation policies.

My third and final point is that reducing greenhouse gas emissions creates jobs and stimulates the economy.

Over the past several decades, California has adopted the most aggressive clean air, energy efficiency and renewable energy policies in the United States. During that same time, our gross state product increased by 83%, the second largest rate of growth of any state in the country.

Key business incubators -- such as Silicon Valley in the north and the biotech corridor in the south -- generate jobs, revenues, and clean technologies. The super-efficient solar panels produced by Powerlight Corporation in my district, and the sleek new electric cars manufactured by Tesla Corporation in the South Bay area, are examples of these technologies.

Just two weeks ago, British Petroleum announced a new \$500 million investment in a clean fuels research facility on the University of California campus in my Senate district.

The evidence is clear: California's climate policies are attracting business and jobs to the state, not driving them away.

Business and industry leaders support strong state climate change policies like the laws we have passed in California because they know it's good for business.

In California, voters last fall approved the single largest infrastructure investment bond in the history of the United States. It provides \$42.7 billion to revitalize transportation, housing, flood protection, and schools.

The public wants us to overhaul our aging and inadequate infrastructure – and doing it will be good for our economy – but not at the expense of our air or environment.

That is the overriding challenge of this new century: To continue to grow our economy while holding ourselves to higher standards of environmental protection.

In closing, I want to emphasize that, for all of the work we've done, even states as large as California can't do it alone. We need strong and decisive action at the federal and international levels.

After all, this is a global problem.

The job ahead isn't easy or painless, as some would have us believe. We've only just begun to understand the scope of global warming and the magnitude of the changes it may bring.

Today, more than ever, the state and federal government must cooperate and attack this problem together.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.