

Karen Telleen-Lawton: Proposition 23 Represents a Step Back

Now's not the time to abandon our support of developing alternative energy

By [Karen Telleen-Lawton](#), [Noozhawk Columnist](#) | Published on 10.04.2010

In 2006, California became the first state to adopt a limit on global warming pollution. Since then, several other states have followed suit. The [U.S. House of Representatives](#) even passed a national version last year. Now, [Proposition 23](#) on November's ballot would reverse the law.

Proposition 23's language isn't complicated — the text promises that the statewide proposition would “suspend implementation of air pollution control law ([Assembly Bill 32](#)) until unemployment drops to 5.5 percent or less for a full year.”

One could say it's like a stimulus bill. Only [Daniel Kammen](#), a [UC-Berkeley](#) professor of energy, says, “No connection exists between California's current unemployment rate and AB 32. ... In fact, the clean tech sector in California is one of the few areas of sustained growth during the current recession.”

The independent [Legislative Analyst's Office](#) finds that suspending AB 32 would “dampen additional investments in clean energy technologies or so-called ‘green jobs’ by private firms, thereby resulting in less economic activity than would otherwise be the case.” Twelve thousand clean-energy firms, which employ a half-million

people and galvanize more than 60 percent of North American venture capital funds, would be affected.

The clean energy sector is still much smaller than old-guard energy. The voter pamphlet estimates the fiscal impact as “likely modest net increases in overall economic activity in the state from suspension of greenhouse gases regulatory activity, resulting in a potentially significant net increase in state and local revenues.” So if we just suspend our clean air regulations until everybody’s back on track ...

But 5.5 percent unemployment has been reached just three times in more than 30 years. This figure basically represents full employment. Thus, the restriction would permanently negate AB 32’s effect.

Mindful of expected effects of global warming on our state, Californians wisely backed AB 32. The lingering effects of the past great recession pale in comparison to flooded coastlines and increased droughts and heat waves.

A recent survey by the [Public Policy Institute of California](#) shows “strong majorities of Californians think the government should require: increased use of renewable energy sources by utilities (85 percent); industrial plants, oil refineries and commercial facilities to reduce emissions (81 percent); all automakers to further reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases from new cars (79 percent); and an increase in energy efficiency for residential and commercial buildings and appliances (75 percent).”

So why the move to forget about global warming right now? A recent

[New York Times](#) report estimated that 97 percent of the \$8.2 million spent on this year's initiative has come from oil companies (locally, Texas-owned [Valero](#) and [Tesoro](#)). Opponents of the suspension aren't nearly as well-funded, but include the state chapters of the [American Lung Association](#), the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [Professional Firefighters](#), the [League of Women Voters of California](#), the [Consumers Union](#) and [AARP](#), as well as a host of smaller organizations up and down the state.

Passage of Proposition 23 would mean giving up California's leadership in supporting the developing alternative energy technology at a time when old energy is proving more dangerous, more expensive and more deleterious to find.

It's not a good match for our forward-looking state.

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations supporting sustainability. Graze her writing and excerpts from Canyon Voices: The Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon at www.CanyonVoices.com.*