

Now is the time for solutions to global warming pollution

By [Bill Magavern](#) (*published Thursday, May 29, 2008*)

California stands at an environmental and economic crossroads. Behind us lie the carbon-belching energy guzzlers of the 20th century. Ahead, a cleaner, greener economy. Choices made in Sacramento in 2008 will determine how quickly we get there, as powerful polluters seek to bog our state down in fossil-fuel dependency.

Two years ago the legislature and governor made California the first state in the nation to put an enforceable limit on emissions of the pollutants that are warming our planet. The California Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32 of 2006, Núñez/Pavley) requires the Air Resources Board (ARB) to formulate a master plan this year that will roll back those emissions to 1990 levels by 2020; the plan should also put our state on track to meet the scientifically established goal of an 80% reduction by 2050, the goal established by Governor Schwarzenegger's executive order. Meeting this challenge is essential to protecting human health, along with our magnificent forests, coast and wildlands, from the effects of global warming pollution.

ARB is off to a good start in its implementation of AB 32. While the agency did experience some rough spots last year, Chair Mary Nichols (who was appointed in the wake of that turmoil) and her team have successfully put the process back on track. They moved quickly to triple the number of early action measures scheduled for adoption by the end of next year, and they met statutory deadlines for adoption of mandatory emissions reporting and assessment of the emissions inventory.

But now, seeking to escape accountability for the pollution they cause, some powerful special interests are lining up to try to derail the progress of California's path-breaking effort to curb climate change. For example, the powerful California Manufacturers and Technology Association fiercely opposed AB 32 as it moved through the legislature. After the bill became law, CMTA started posturing as a cooperative party, claiming that it was interested in a successful implementation of AB 32. But earlier this month CMTA revealed its true goal, joining some obstructionist and reactionary Senate Republicans in calling for a one-year delay in AB 32's critically needed emission reduction rules.

These Senate Republicans held last year's budget hostage in a futile attempt to weaken California's Environmental Quality Act. Now, they're again showing why they're a minority party -- they're so desperate to please their corporate contributors that they're trying to roll back

vital protections that most Californians strongly support. They are out of touch with the governor and with the voters of all parties, who understand that cleaning up our air and atmosphere helps California's economy. In fact, AB 32 already is driving technological innovation that will fuel California's economy, and is attracting clean tech companies to our state. Delaying AB 32's emission reductions would not only worsen global warming, it would also hamper development of the Golden State's emerging green economy.

Green jobs have suddenly become a hot topic in the State Capitol, with several legislators introducing bills that seek to stimulate the clean-tech sector and train workers for tasks like installing solar panels and upgrading the efficiency of heating-and-cooling systems. Sierra Club California supports the twin goals of accelerating the shift to a green economy and training Californians for jobs that sustain both our families and our ecology. In the words of Van Jones, founder of Green for All, "The new green economy needs to be the vehicle that reaches out and includes the people and the communities we have thrown away."

Leading the way toward that new green economy will be a major challenge for California's cash-strapped government. While ARB clearly takes the lead in California's greenhouse-gas reduction efforts, many other agencies need to play major roles in reducing emissions from transportation, land use, water projects, electricity, solid waste, forestry, agriculture, government facilities and other sources. California's government should have a united and coordinated approach to curbing global warming. For example, when the California Transportation Commission allocates funds for transportation projects, and when Department of Water Resources plans water projects, they should assure that those projects reduce, rather than worsen, global warming pollution.

The majority of the required cuts in pollution should come from performance standards that directly reduce emissions by forcing automakers to make cars that pollute less and use less gasoline, requiring oil companies to make cleaner gasoline, and making electric utilities acquire one-third of their power from clean energy sources. These measures will make California's air healthier to breathe at the same time as they help curb global warming. ARB's plan also should provide incentives for smart growth, so people can spend more time with their families and less in their vehicles.

Furthermore, polluters should have to pay for the privilege of emitting waste gases into our atmosphere. Revenue raised from the major polluters should be used to promote clean energy and public transit, reduce energy costs of low-income consumers, protect natural resources, and support skills training for green jobs.

The task is large and the stakes are high, but finding the right solutions to global warming can improve our quality of life.