

Don't let lobbyists love AB 32 to death

Sacramento Bee, 7-13-10

Some fossil fuel producers push Proposition 23 to overturn Assembly Bill 32, the landmark law to combat climate change by cutting greenhouse gas emissions. But industry lobbyists are focused on an entirely separate and equally significant front: the regulatory process to implement the law.

The Bee's Rick Daysog reported Monday that industry lobbyists are focused on shaping the guts of AB 32. They greatly outgun lobbyists for environmentalists and health groups. While the November initiative would dismantle the law, the regulatory process could produce a weakened version.

Ten oil companies and their trade group working on AB 32 disclose that they have spent \$11 million on their overall lobbying effort in the past 18 months – 15 times the overall lobbying sums spent by environmental and health groups working on AB 32.

State officials writing the regulations must stand firm against industry and political pressure, and make certain the intent of the law is realized.

The 2006 law provides a statement of goals: reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the end of the decade. Legislators who wrote the law left the hard details of implementing AB 32 to regulators led by the California Air Resources Board, which has a history of independence.

Implementation is no easy feat. A so-called "cap and trade" system in which polluters pay others to offset their pollution would be complicated at best and potentially unenforceable.

Lobbyists have an absolute right to help shape the law to ensure that what emerges works. But they must not be permitted to sabotage it.

We find reason for optimism, and for concern. Catherine Reheis-Boyd, president of the Western States Petroleum Association, the main oil industry trade group, told Daysog that companies understand the state's desire to reduce carbon. Their goal, she said, is "make sure that we write regulations that we can comply with and are feasible to do."

State officials need to be clear that they are writing the regulations, not industry. California has an opportunity to lead the country on a fundamental issue. The regulators must succeed. If they do, they would be leaving the state a better place than they found it.