

# State's anti-global warming effort at crossroads

Michael Gardner, San Diego Union-Tribune, 10-10-10

SACRAMENTO — California's voters will decide whether to dramatically temper the state's aggressive campaign to curb global warming, a decision carrying economic and environmental implications nationwide.

Proposition 23 on the Nov. 2 ballot would block most of the state's regulations aiming to curb greenhouse gas emissions linked to global warming until unemployment drops substantially for a sustained period of time — a distant target given most forecasts do not predict a strong rebound for some time.

For the most part, the campaign over whether to suspend California's signature anti-global warming law focuses on saving and creating jobs.

But which kind? And how many? Both sides say their position is pro-jobs.

Supporters of the initiative say thousands of jobs will be lost, mostly in traditional industry or businesses due to projected higher energy costs and more regulation. Opponents counter that, if passed, Proposition 23 would stymie employment growth in the alternative energy sector, one of the lone bright spots in California's gloomy economy.

David Steel, president of SmarterLight based in Encinitas, said his company has taken off thanks to the state's push toward cleaner energy and fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

And his business is not alone. The Green Chamber of San Diego County reports consistent growth for the region's emerging sustainable energy sector.

"A lot of those jobs are here because there is a need for clean energy," said Steel, whose company markets energy-efficient lighting. from Christmas tree bulbs to desk lamps.

But Bryan Bloom, who owns Priority Moving in San Diego, said he is bracing for higher costs that will kill expansion and hiring plans if Proposition 23 fails.

"The cost of energy will go up," he said. "I can't run my trucks on solar or wind."

Alarmed by growing warnings of a planet in peril, Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger aligned with Democrats in 2006 to support legislation to rein in greenhouse gas emissions, widely blamed for global warming. They warned of lighter snowpacks leading to extended droughts, sea level rise and more fire-prone forests, among other possible catastrophes.

The result: Approval of Assembly Bill 32, the first of its kind in the nation. Signed by the governor, the legislation requires the state to gradually roll back greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, a cut of roughly 25 percent.

It handed authority for implementing the plan to the Air Resources Board.

Proposition 23 would suspend the law until the state's unemployment rate dips below 5.5 percent for four consecutive quarters. That's a tall order given the rate is now above 12 percent and has only rarely been under 5.5 percent for that long of a stretch.

Buoyed by Assembly Bill 32's passage, environmentalists and green-energy advocates launched similar campaigns in other states with mixed results. At the national level, Congress began debating countrywide standards. But as the economy tanked, support waned and those urging more restrictions fear that if California retreats, momentum will never swing back their way.

"All eyes are on California," said Derek Walker, who tracks climate change issues for the Environmental Defense Fund,

Much of the higher energy cost opponents cite could result from a complex regulation that has yet to be fully vetted: "cap and trade."

The Air Resources Board is moving to cap emissions by distinct sectors, such as refineries. Those that exceed the threshold will have to buy or trade the right to go over their limit, or invest in technology to control emissions.

The air board later this month is expected to unveil its cap-and-trade program, which would not go into full effect until 2012 — unless Proposition 23 passes.

Proposition 23 supporters say this system amounts to nothing more than a new energy tax in a state already plagued by some of the highest bills in the country. They maintain that those who can will leave California.

But Gerardo Herrera, owner of five supermarkets in the San Diego region, including Mercado International in Chula Vista, is convinced that the regulations will lead to energy-saving lighting and refrigeration.

"At first change is difficult," Herrera said. "The result is good."

Others counter that the alternative energy sector can flourish without AB 32.

"There's nothing in Proposition 23 that prohibits existing green-tech companies from staying in California or new ones from coming here. In fact, there would be more incentive ... to invest their money in a state that has fewer regulations and lower costs," said John Kabateck, executive director of the California chapter of National Federation of Independent Business,

It's not all about money, opponents of Proposition 23 say. Reducing carbon emissions cuts harmful pollutants that can exacerbate illnesses, from asthma to heart disease.

"This is one of the great public health advances of the 21st Century," said Michael Kelly, a retired doctor living in San Diego."

Opponents of Proposition 23 are also putting more emphasis on arguments that the regulations will reduce dependency on oil. And that is why Texas oil companies have spent millions to pass the initiative, said Steve Maviglio, a spokesman for the opposition.

Regardless of the outcome Nov. 2, some of the state's most stringent rules will stay in place since they were adopted independently of Assembly Bill 32.

For example, automakers must deliver cleaner cars to showrooms under separate tailpipe emission standards and utilities will still be required to produce 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources, such as wind and solar. However, by passing the initiative, voters would be blocking a more strict, 33 percent mandate.

## Proposition 23

Would suspend the state law limiting greenhouse gas emissions until the state's unemployment rate dips below 5.5 percent for four consecutive quarters.

**PRO:** The law will drive up energy costs, scaring more businesses away from the state and discouraging expansion. California acting alone will have little impact on overall emissions given the global nature of the problem.

Supporters: Texas based oil interests, manufacturers, traditional business groups and the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

**Website:** [www.yeson23.com](http://www.yeson23.com)

**CON:** The law has sparked a surge in new green energy companies. Global warming must be curbed given its threat to the environment and water supplies. The law reduces reliance on fossil fuels and improves public health.

Opponents: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sempra Energy, several large utilities, environmentalists, alternative energy companies and venture capitalists.

Website: [www.stopdirtyenergyprop.com](http://www.stopdirtyenergyprop.com)