

# Brown's steady march to an alternative energy future

Tom Hayden, Sacramento Bee, 6-1-14

Tom Hayden served as Gov. Jerry Brown's solar energy council chairman in the 1970s and chaired the Senate's Natural Resources Committee from 1986-90.

California is poised to spend \$120 billion by 2020 toward constructing a sustainable green economy.

That's a lot of money, about 10 times greater annually than the United Kingdom, with twice California's population, invests on farms and other solar applications.

These renewable investments solidify California's role as a showcase the Obama administration can point to at the United Nations climate change talks scheduled for Peru in December and for France in December 2015.

The \$120 billion green stimulus package – about \$20 billion annually through 2020 – includes: \$14.9 billion in the 2012-13 budget for energy efficiency, renewables, advanced transportation and low-carbon fuels; \$2 billion to \$5 billion a year in projected annual cap-and-trade revenue; and \$500 million to \$1 billion a year in the Proposition 39 clean energy job creation fund.

Since Gov. Jerry Brown's first term in 1974, California has been on a steady march to an alternative energy future. Our tailpipe efficiency standards, ridiculed by Detroit in the 1970s, became the federal standard by 2010, and tripled America's fuel efficiency. California's energy-saving appliance measures and green building codes also have been exported across the U.S.

California is the likely catalyst in the spreading battle against climate change, which the state Energy Commission document calls "the great unifier."

President Barack Obama will help considerably if his administration implements tighter regulations on coal-fired plants and says no to the Keystone XL Pipeline bearing heavy crude oil from Canada. But new regulations need new revenue to build a clean-energy economy, and on that question the climate change deniers and fossil fuel fundamentalists have stymied Obama in the House of Representatives.

Enter Brown as a modern Archimedes, the ancient Greek philosopher who searched for a leverage point from which to transform the world. California is that leverage point, a modern economy that Brown wants to "decarbonize." Brown pledges the creation of 500,000 clean energy jobs over his two terms, on top of the current 1.2 million.

His energy advisers claim \$74 billion already in consumer utility savings from conservation. The state is the magnet for two-thirds of the clean energy venture investment capital in the country, and Brown is calling for targeted divestments of pension funds from coal. Solar and renewables are on track to supply one-third or more of the state's electricity needs by 2020. Zero-emission standards will lead to 1.5 million green cars on our roads in the next decade.

It's a long way from the early days when Brown was ridiculed as a Zen outlier speaking riddles about renewables. None dare call him Moonbeam now.

In retrospect, the real crackpots were those who insisted during Brown's first gubernatorial campaign that California needed 65 nuclear plants along the coastline.

Brown is even conducting his own clean energy diplomacy, using the California model as leverage. California has formal pacts with Oregon, Washington state, British Columbia and Quebec toward maximizing carbon reduction. There now is an eight-state pact on electric cars led by California. States like Massachusetts and Maryland are adopting similar initiatives. Brown has traveled to China, met with its highest officials and launched a bilateral exchange based on California's model of reducing air pollution while sustaining economic growth. He soon will visit Mexico for the same purpose.

One stumbling block on the road to Brown's leadership is his stance on industrial fracking. Environmental groups are critical of the governor for his refusal to support a moratorium, which they believe is the minimum needed until critical studies answer questions about the contamination of groundwater and deadly emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas.

Angry "fracktivists" hound the governor at public appearances, reminiscent of the fervent "no nukes" activists of the '70s. National mainstream environmentalists from the Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council are pushing hard for a moratorium, too. Large demonstrations outside of Brown's office are being discussed.

Brown and Sacramento Democrats are under major pressure from the powerful Western States Petroleum Association, whose hungry lobbyists promise a new era of jobs and independence through deep drilling in the state's vast Monterey shale deposits extending across the Central Valley to the Santa Barbara coast. The fracking lobby's hope for a "black gold rush" was seriously deflated by the recent federal report concluding that California's shale potential is wildly exaggerated. The feds slashed their estimate of recoverable oil in the Monterey shale region by 96 percent.

Events are changing on the ground in Los Angeles, where fracking by a major oil firm there has led to an angry public outcry. The protest resulted in a citywide moratorium ordinance by council president Herb Wesson, in whose district the drilling took place. The Los Angeles moratorium could expand to L.A. County after this November's supervisor elections, which would triple the amount of oil left in the ground.

As the fracking controversy moves from remote Kern County to the vastness of Los Angeles, the momentum for a state moratorium will increase. But business-friendly Democrats in Sacramento have teamed up with Republicans to defeat a moratorium bill by Sen. Holly Mitchell, who represents the Los Angeles district where the fracking threatens.

Lacking legislative support, Brown's alternative is to build a regulatory apparatus so formidable that fracking won't be occurring any time soon. That won't appease some environmentalists who think regulations inherently are meant to facilitate fracking. But new regulations also may discourage or delay risky investments.

Recent legislation is allowing Brown to hire 66 new staff and four top executives at the state agency in charge of oil and gas permits, which is historically friendly to industry. In addition, experts from the state water and air boards are empowered to monitor effects on pollution. Resources Secretary John Laird presides over a multiagency final approval process.

That regulatory buildup may deter the formidable fracking lobby and free Brown to pursue his larger agenda. That, combined with stronger public opposition, may be the only path to keeping the “black gold” in the ground.

Another problem looms: whether the state government is even capable of spending \$120 billion in the most efficient way to cut greenhouse gas emissions. As the legislative analyst noted in 2012, “the state currently lacks a comprehensive strategy that fully coordinates these activities.” The bonanza could incentivize boondoggles or competition between interest groups with their own agendas.

For example, the governor wants \$250 million set aside yearly from cap-and-trade funds for his high-speed rail project. That may well be worthy in the long run, but the first leg will not even be operational until 2022, two years past the present deadline for slashing emissions. Brown’s insistence on the train project tempts other legislators to pull out their carving knives to pursue funds for their favored priorities.

Another challenge is making the connection between greenhouse gas reductions and environmental justice. The people most affected by pollution, poor health and structural inequality are people of color in the inner cities and the agricultural sector. They are a decisive voter bloc in supporting environmental causes, but under-represented among the interest groups.

That is changing, however. “We need to teach the electric car to speak Spanish,” says state Sen. Kevin de León, likely the next leader of the Senate. Only forceful public policies can offset the inherent disparities perpetuated by an unregulated market. One of de León’s bills guarantees that 10 percent of cap-and-trade funds go to disadvantaged communities. Another aims at reducing emissions from trucks and freight trains that pollute poorer communities the most.

On the global level, environmental justice is in dispute between rich and poor nations, and the leading cause of recent summit breakdowns because, simply put, the poorer nations receive the brunt of pollution’s effects while lacking budget resources to mitigate the damage. Some sort of green New Deal is the most obvious answer. Since that won’t be entertained amidst the political paralysis in Washington, the California model writ large becomes the catalyst for now.

Brown will have to lift the debate above his worthy brain trust and express a unifying vision calling on Californians to do their part. The next generation needs to be called to work for the planet.