

## **Utility fees sought for environmental research center**

### **A state Assembly panel backs a surcharge for the proposed Climate Change Research and Workforce Development Institute.**

By Marc Lifsher, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer  
L.A. Times, Tuesday, August 26, 2008

SACRAMENTO -- With this year's legislative session in its final days, lawmakers Monday unveiled a bill mandating new fees from electricity ratepayers to fund a University of California-run global warming research center.

The surcharge, amounting to \$37 million a year for up to a decade, would be paid by customers of regulated utilities such as Southern California Edison Co. and publicly owned ones, including the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The fees would partially fund an \$87-million-a-year Climate Change Research and Workforce Development Institute, whose location has yet to be decided.

If it becomes law, the bill would add an average of 10 cents a month to electricity bills statewide, backers said.

The proposal, the product of weeks of closed-door negotiations, hits customers of Edison and two other investor-owned utilities with lower fees than a similar plan the California Public Utilities Commission approved in April.

"Dealing with the enormous problems and concerns about global warming may be the biggest challenge of our generation," said Sen. Christine Kehoe (D-San Diego), a cosponsor of the bill. "The only way to deal with this challenge is to focus our energy and intellectual capital."

On Monday, the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee approved the bill on a 7-3 vote. It still must win the backing of another committee and both the Assembly and Senate before the Legislature hits a deadline for the passage of bills that are not related to the still-pending state budget.

The bill, SB 1762 by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland), is backed by the University of California, the California State University system and the University of Southern California, which could benefit from sharing nearly \$900 million in research grants in the first 10 years.

The institute is expected to focus its academic work on four areas, with the aim of bolstering California's drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 25% by 2025. It plans to develop emissions-cutting technology, research ways to switch to a low-carbon economy, fine-tune forecasts of climate change effects and foster industries that provide high-tech "green" jobs.

Ratepayer advocates are unenthusiastic about piling new fees on residential consumers but say they don't oppose the Perata bill.

"Anything funded through rates is a concern for us, especially in the economic conditions we're in now," said Mindy Spatt of the San Francisco-based Utility Reform Network. "We're seeing more and more shut-offs and expect the situation to get worse."

Michael Shames, executive director of the Utility Consumers' Action Network in San Diego, said he saw "no compelling need" for the new research center and predicted it would duplicate the efforts of the California Air Resources Board. That agency is charged with implementing California's landmark global warming law of 2006.

Shames conceded, however, that the late-in-the-session bill was better than a similar initiative by the Public Utilities Commission that would have raised \$60 million just from ratepayers of Edison, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. and San Diego Gas & Electric Co.

The PUC effort stalled after lawyers for the Legislature concluded that the commission had no authority to set up and single-handedly fund the research center. The PUC has taken no position on the Perata bill. Neither has Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who supported the PUC project.

Another agency, the California Energy Commission, supports the thrust of the legislation but opposes the bill because it would transfer \$50 million from state programs, including commission funds, to the proposed UC research center. "It's going too fast and too far with a good idea," Commissioner Arthur Rosenfeld said.

### **D.C. Joins Suit Filed Over Greenhouse Emissions**

Reuters

In the Washington Post, Tuesday, August 26, 2008

The District, New York City and 12 states are suing federal environmental regulators over greenhouse gas emissions from oil refineries, the New York attorney general's office said yesterday.

The suit, led by New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, claims that the Environmental Protection Agency violated the federal Clean Air Act by refusing to issue standards, known as new-source performance standards, for controlling global-warming pollution emissions from oil refineries.

The suit was filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

### **E.P.A. Sued by 12 States to Regulate Oil Refineries**

By REUTERS

In the N.Y. Times, Tuesday, August 26, 2008

Twelve states, including New York, are suing the Environmental Protection Agency over greenhouse gas emissions from oil refineries.

The lawsuit, led by Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo of New York, accuses the agency of violating the federal Clean Air Act by refusing to issue standards, known as new source performance standards, for controlling the emissions.

"The E.P.A.'s refusal to control pollution from oil refineries is the latest example of the Bush administration's do-nothing policy on global warming," Mr. Cuomo said in a news release. "Oil refineries contribute substantially to global warming, posing grave threats to New York's environment, health and economy."

In a ruling last year, the Supreme Court found that the agency had the power to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act. Since then, the agency's director has said it is the job of Congress to regulate them.

Coalitions of states have also sued the agency to require it to set standards for emissions from power plants and to uphold the right of states to regulate emissions from automobiles.

The suit, filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, said about 15 percent of industrial emissions of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas, came from the refineries.

It seeks to force the agency to control refinery emissions and adopt the new source performance standards.

Tim Lyons, a spokesman for the agency, said time and money would be better spent by encouraging Congress to take action on environmental legislation.

The other states in the suit are: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington. Two cities, New York and Washington, also signed on.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Aug. 26, 2008:](#)

**'Fragile environs'**

Again, because of The Bee's alertness to health issues in our special Valley, we are aware of threats to our air and general health quality in Fresno County.

I was dismayed that the Fresno County Board of Supervisors recently gave the go ahead to the gravel-mining operations in the east Sanger area. Thanks to Supervisors Henry Perea and Judy Case, it was not a unanimous vote, but Vulcan and Calaveras still have permission to continue and expand.

What will it take to convince the powers that be we can no longer desecrate our fragile environs this way? The list of negative impacts is long -- pollution, heavy truck usage impacting traffic and the condition of our roads, the immense drain on scarce water supplies (we are in a drought!) and another thought: What is working in this dust and unhealthy environment doing to the laborers?

I ask members of the board and planning commission to not allow the Mexican company Cemex to blow the top off our Jesse Morrow Mountain -- a sacred American Indian site.

*Ethel Harder, Fresno*

[Sacramento Bee, Letters to the Editor, Monday, August 25, 2008](#)

### **Pesticide ruling will darken the skies**

Although I have enjoyed watching the summer Olympics this year, my enthusiasm for the Games has been somewhat dampened by the depressing cloud of smog that constantly hangs over Beijing. I cringe to imagine what it must be like for Beijing's many residents to live daily in such an unhealthy environment. Unfortunately, I may not have to use my imagination for much longer.

The ruling by a federal appellate court has overturned the decision by an area judge that would have required the state Department of Pesticide Regulation to reduce the environmental impact of pesticide spraying by meeting reasonable emission reduction standards ("9th Circuit ruling is pesticide win for state," Page B11, Aug. 21). This unfortunate victory for big agri-business represents another failure by the state to address our local air-quality problems. The state needs to crack down on polluters now by making them pay for the smog they produce and putting a cap on their pollution.

How long can we afford to ignore our air-quality problems before we won't want to go outside anymore? If you don't think it can happen, just watch the Olympics.

Chris Theg, Davis

### **Our future depends on public transit**

Re ("New RT line's costs balloon," Page B1, Aug. 21): I found the article both informative and disheartening. Our state needs to cut global warming pollution levels significantly, and expanding public transportation options immediately will help us achieve this goal. Unfortunately, a series of snags is delaying the light-rail extension to Elk Grove. Equally important is the implementation of the global warming pollution cap recently passed in the state Assembly. As a proud, lifelong California resident, I would love to see California recognized as the definitive leader in the fight against global warming. Key to this goal is persuading Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to implement a system under which polluters pay for the global warming pollution they emit. Income from this program should be used toward clean energy solutions such as wind, solar and zero-emissions public transit. Having a financial pool funded by polluters will help projects like light rail move along in a timely fashion.

Jarrett Mason, Sacramento