

Cash for clunkers

Programs aim to get you out of that junker, and into a vehicle with better gas mileage

By Ross Farrow

Lodi News Sentinel, Friday, July 3, 2009

Have a car with bad gas mileage? Or a car that failed the smog test? You may qualify for a few grand if you turn in that clunker to a wrecking yard.

The federal and state governments, plus the local air pollution control district, have separate programs that vary in format and qualifications.

The state has expanded its program to provide incentives up to \$4,000 to vehicle owners who turn in their cars with the worst smog-forming tailpipe emissions.

And President Barack Obama signed a bill last week giving credits of up to \$4,500 for cars at least 25 years old that get 18 miles per gallon or less.

You can't receive more than one credit, said Mike Anderson, manager of Pick 'n' Pull in south Stockton, the only wrecking yard in San Joaquin County participating in the state program.

"We do have a pretty consistent calling," Anderson said. "(Vehicles) have to run when they bring that in to us."

Pick 'n' Pull, located on Clark Drive, east of Highway 99 and south of Mariposa Road, participates in the state program, but Anderson said he doesn't know if the federal government will contract with the company.

Federal program

U.S. Car Allowance Rebate System (CARS)

- * Car must be no older than 25 years.
- * Get 18 miles a gallon or less.
- * Is drivable.
- * Be registered.
- * Be insured for the past year.

The law requires dealers to be registered with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to participate in the program. Agency officials are working to register interested dealers as soon as the registration process begins. As dealers are registered, they will be listed on the administration's Web site.

For more information, visit www.cars.gov.

State of California

Beginning April 1, 2010, drivers could get \$1,000 if they turn their car into a licensed dismantler. Low-income Californians would be eligible for \$1,500.

The regulation also provides a voucher between \$2,000 and \$2,500 to drivers in two of the state's most polluted regions — the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California.

The vouchers could be redeemed at new and used dealerships for a fuel efficient car that's four years old or newer. Low-income Californians could buy a fuel efficient car up to eight years old.

The program is administered by the California Air Resources Board.

For more information, visit www.cashforjunkcars.net.

[San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#)

- Must live in the district, which extends from San Joaquin County to Kern County.
- Vehicles must be continuously registered for the past two years, be in drivable condition and passed the most recent smog check. Unused vehicles are not eligible because, by definition, they aren't polluting the air, according to Kevin Wing of the pollution control district.
- Call (877) 900-JUNK to find out if you qualify and where you can take the car you want to discard.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org/Grant_Programs/PASS/pass_eng.htm.

Source: New York Times, The Associated Press, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Some 300,000 California drivers who own cars older than model year 1976 will be solicited by local air districts.

The state had a different car scrap program, but it was limited to cars newer than model year 1976 that failed the state's smog check.

The Legislature, in 2007, directed the board to expand the program to get more polluting cars off roads. The state put the program on hold last September due to the budget crisis. The program awarded \$1,000 for people to junk their cars or \$500 toward repairs required to pass a smog test, according to Kevin Wing, who heads a separate auto scrap and salvage program for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Air regulators strengthened the Legislature's directive by providing Californians with vouchers to buy fuel-efficient cars. To qualify, cars that are model year 2009 or older would have to get about 28 miles per gallon. The standard would increase to 42 miles per gallon for model years 2010 to 2015.

For now, the federal and state programs would not overlap. The federal program runs through November whereas the state incentives begin April 1. However, state regulators were concerned Congress might extend federal incentives into next year.

The air pollution control district plans a new program on Monday called the Polluting Automobile Scrap and Salvage Program. By calling the district, vehicle owners can find out whether they are eligible for \$5,000 toward a replacement vehicle or \$1,000 for people who don't qualify for the \$5,000, Wing said.

The \$5,000 won't go into the car owner's pocket; it will go directly to the auto dealership as a credit, Wing said. The program requires customers to purchase a car built in 2006 or later unless the customer is considered low-income. Then they can buy a car as old as a 2003 model, Wing said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Greenhouse guidelines prove elusive

By Ben Keller

The Business Journal, Thursday, 02 July 2009

Sitting in on the June 30 workshop of the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) to discuss its Climate Change Action Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, I began to discover what a complex issue it is to mitigate emissions.

The district panel began by clarifying that very few measures exist to determine the impact of greenhouse gases or which types of projects cause significant harm. The little that they do have at their disposal is a somewhat outdated process of approving land use permits as described in the 1970 California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The district has settled on a set of guidelines to reduce emissions using best performance standards based on goals laid down in the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32) of 2006. The act states that if pollution continues as it has, by conducting "business as usual," a 29-percent annual reduction would be needed to get greenhouse gas emissions down to 1990 levels. Therefore, every year until then must meet a portion of those reductions to help achieve that goal.

Best performance standards include technology, project design features and other energy efficient practices that limit emissions. Seems pretty simple except that best performance standards of reduction will need to change year to year based on new technologies or the nature of the project itself.

One person said it would be misleading for the district to measure the effectiveness of new emission reduction technologies while continuing to base them on older standards. Another made the comment that machines such as boilers are not all used to the same degree so they can't be lumped into one emissions category.

Another wasn't convinced that reduction strategies ruled by the district to be achieved in practice were necessarily cost effective or based on normal conditions in industry. There seemed to be a general consensus that many of these strategies were arbitrary and not entirely proportional to the scope of the project itself. Some were confused as to which projects may be exempt from the adopted guidelines.

Aside from any misgivings or concerns about the plan in progress, many of those present were appreciative of the effort the district was taking to invite the public into the process. The public has until July 14 to issue written comments to the district about the Climate Change Action Plan, details of which can be found at www.valleyair.org under Programs. Comments should be addressed to Arnaud Marjollet at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD), 1990 East Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726.

Fresno ranked greenest in Valley

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Saturday, Jul. 04, 2009

Out of 100 Central Valley cities, Fresno has the greenest ideas for growth over the next three decades, says a groundbreaking study by the University of California at Davis.

But Fresno still may not be able to protect land, water and air from explosive growth, says lead author Mark Lubell. He doubts other cities will have much luck either. Green policies still could be pushed aside for pollution-causing sprawl that earns more money for city treasuries.

"The status quo is very difficult to derail," said Lubell, an associate professor of environmental science and policy at UC Davis. "Cities need money. A sprawl-oriented growth pattern raises income from sales tax and development fees."

His suggestion: Consider revising Proposition 13, the property tax limit passed more than 30 years ago. He said one way cities compensated for the loss of income was by allowing more development at the edge of town, where businesses found cheap property and a growing base of customers.

The longer commutes created by sprawl generated more [air pollution](#) and greenhouse gases in one of the nation's dirtiest air basins.

These issues soon will become more important, Lubell said. The Central Valley -- which includes the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys -- is forecast to expand from 7 million to 12 million residents by 2040, making it one of the fastest-growing places in America. For the last 18 months, Lubell and a team of researchers looked at Central Valley cities to see whether they are preparing for sustainable growth. In the study, sustainable growth refers to such factors as air quality, ground-water recharge, high-density residential land use and renewable energy sources, such as solar.

The UC Davis study, published Tuesday in the Journal of the American Planning Association, is considered by planners and researchers to be the first serious attempt to rank these growth policies among the region's 100 incorporated cities.

Fresno seems best prepared, the study showed. The city has the state's top waste-recycling program, an emphasis on clean-fuel vehicles and an idea for a vast environmentally friendly development on the southeast flank.

Lubell said a revamped Prop. 13 might bring in enough income to soften the debate over the need for more money. Fresno and other cities could fill in downtown gaps, provide better transit to get people out of their cars and promote communities where people walk to stores.

Even if Prop. 13 remains untouched, Central Valley cities still should adopt green-growth policies, Lubell said. Look to Fresno, Sacramento and other top-ranked cities in the study for ideas, he said.

Why are these cities so progressive? These bigger cities are trying to fix decades of planning mistakes, he said. By using more progressive planning policies, smaller, lower-ranked cities could skip those mistakes, Lubell said.

To determine the rankings, researchers assigned numeric values to green growth policies relating to land use, zoning, transportation, pollution prevention, energy conservation and economic development. Cities were given points for their policies and commitments to green growth.

Fresno ranked highest, primarily on the strength of two initiatives -- Fresno Green, which links the economic goals to cleaning the environment, and the Southeast Growth Area, which is targeted to absorb at least 20% of city growth in the next two decades.

Fresno also gets credit for a solar energy farm at Fresno Yosemite International Airport and the successful recycling to divert wastes from landfills.

Keith Berthold, Fresno's interim planning director, said the Southeast Growth Area is envisioned with a massive network of trails, open space, compact growth and viable transit options. The area could surpass the 2020 state goals of greenhouse gas reduction and become a leader in California. "We think we can reduce ozone and particulate matter by one half in this area," he said. "These will be walkable, livable neighborhoods."

Council Member Henry T. Perea said the UC study is vindication of hard work officials have done to clean up Fresno, which has had a reputation for bad air and a failing downtown.

Visalia was fourth in the rankings, behind Sacramento and Davis. Visalia is known for a robust and walkable downtown, which has live entertainment, restaurants and businesses.

Fred Brusuelas, city planner and assistant community development director, said the city's plan for the southeast quadrant will include six small communities with central business areas where people can walk to coffee shops or businesses.

He said the city wants to harvest stormwater in the area by keeping it in a small creek and directing it to grassy, open areas where it can seep into the ground.

"We don't want to put it in a storm drainage line and move it to another part of the city," he said. "We want it to percolate into the ground and increase the underground water table in that area."

Researcher Lubell said cities must put such environmental approaches on an equal footing with economic and social values, even through tough economic times.

"With this research, we're hoping to spark a commitment to sustainable planning," he said. "So often when there are budget problems, green policies are viewed as boutique polices. So they are the first things that go away."

Independent gas station owners say regulations squeezing too hard

By Joe Goldeen, MediaNews

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, July 06, 2009

STOCKTON — Independent gas stations are in a fight for their lives.

Not only are gasoline sales down 8 to 10 percent in California over the past year, the sour economy is making many people think twice about those spur-of-the-moment snack purchases that are the lifeblood of the convenience stores attached to those gas stations.

On top of that, expensive new government-imposed regulations are taking a big chunk of their bottom line as independent operators struggle to repay business loans and, in many cases, fines for noncompliance.

"The new EVR (enhanced vapor recovery) lines are here. It does nothing and the cost is horrendous: \$20,000 to \$35,000, and the small independents are asked to put those in or we're shut down," said Phillip Elder, of the tiny Country Club Food & Fuel, a neighborhood service station, convenience store and bait shop. Elder manages the station for his son, owner Jerome Elder.

April 1 was the deadline — extended to May 15 — for California service stations to install enhanced vapor-recovery equipment to remove smog-producing vapors emitted when gas is dispensed at the pump.

According to the California Air Resources Board, 80 percent of the 11,000 stations throughout the state had either complied with the regulation or had applied for a permit to do so by the original deadline. Experts at the ARB estimated that the retrofits cost roughly \$11,000 per pump.

The required improved nozzles and vapor processors will eliminate the daily release of up to 10 tons of smog-forming compounds from spillage and fugitive emissions — the equivalent of taking 450,000 cars off the road, according to ARB.

In the Elders' case, they were not able to meet the deadline and have been assessed a \$500 fine — reduced from \$1,000 because of the economy — by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"I wasn't able to get bank financing, so I had to borrow from my sons to do the EVR upgrades," Elder said, noting that no commercial lender he contacted was willing to consider a loan in the current economy.

"The fine will be paid, but I cannot afford it. This is terrible. That \$500 can be used for rent, the electric bill, inventory. We're already having problems. This business has been here since 1979," Elder said.

Elder continued to rail against onerous government regulation, noting that he has to maintain 19 annual permits costing the business between \$15,000 and \$20,000 annually.

"California keeps throwing these things at them without any money to help out. ... Just knowing the regulatory regimes service stations and convenience stores face that sell alcohol and sell tobacco, they are the most regulated piece of property per square foot in California," said Jay McKeeman, vice president of government relations for the Sacramento-based California Independent Oil Marketers Association, a trade group.

Nick Bokides, 51, of Lodi, whose family has owned retail gas stations in the Central Valley since 1958 and who was president of the trade group in 2000, said in the current economic environment "there is very little chance of making a good living selling gasoline. There is a tremendous amount of pressure on small operators right now."

Bokides said there are a number of different agencies to whom they must report such as environmental health organizations, air pollution districts and city or county business licenses.

Fire temporarily closes Yosemite trails, roads

By Cyndee Fontana

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, Jul. 05, 2009

Two lightning-caused fires in Yosemite National Park have forced temporary closures of trails and roads, park authorities said today.

Travelers can expect temporary road delays and closures due to smoke and firefighters working along Wawona and Glacier Point roads, according to the National Park Service. Fire and smoke are visible along the roads, and drivers should use caution.

Several trails also have been closed for public safety. The closures are Smith Meadow to White Wolf and Aspen Valley to White Wolf. There is an alternate route to Pate Valley from White Wolf, which bypasses the fire area.

The Grouse Fire, located three miles southwest of Yosemite Valley and north of Glacier Point Road, involves about 2,300 acres and is roughly 50% contained. The Harden Fire on the north side of the park, west of Harden Lake and northwest of White Wolf, is currently 1,594 acres and 75% contained.

On the Grouse Fire, crews are working to limit fire spread to an area east of the Wawona Road and north of Glacier Point Road.

The Harden fire has reached 95% of the anticipated acreage that managers plan for the fire.

Both fires have been burning for roughly a month.

Crews are trying to complete work on containment lines before the weather changes. Forecasters say several low-pressure systems are heading toward the area, which could bring cooler temperatures and possible strong winds.

All park facilities remain open. Park visitors may see smoky conditions in the late evening and early morning and [air quality may be affected](#).

Information about the fires is available at (209) 375-9574, www.inciweb.org/incident/1704 or www.inciweb.org/incident/1708

State: Beware possible pollution after fireworks this holiday weekend

In the O.C Register, Friday, July 3, 2009

The state health and environmental conservation departments are advising the public of possible increase in air pollution levels after fireworks displays this holiday weekend.

According to the state, increases in pollution occur after sunset when fireworks displays are held, and "can continue into the next day depending on meteorological conditions -- such as if a stagnant air mass enables the particles to continue to be trapped in a location for an extended period of time."

Breezy or windy conditions reduce the likelihood that the pollution would be a concern, the state says.

For some, exposure to the fine particulate matter -- PM2.5, which consists of tiny solid particles or liquid droplets -- can cause short-term health effects such as irritation to the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, sneezing, runny nose and shortness of breath.

People with asthma, heart disease, and children and the elderly may be particularly sensitive to PM2.5.

For daily air quality forecasts by the state, visit
http://www.dec.ny.gov/cfm/xtapps/aqi/aqi_info.cfm

Young environmentalists tackle West Oakland pollution

By Cecily Burt, Oakland Tribune

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, July 3, 2009

It started two years ago with a simple walk around the neighborhood. It then morphed into a project to collect and test soot and dust for lead, and now it has evolved into a full-fledged scientific experiment conducted by high school students in West Oakland to identify airborne toxic source emissions that foul the air they breathe.

A handful of students in EXCEL High School's Law and Government Academy, their instructor, who first piqued their interest in environmental justice, and representatives from two environmental organizations stood on the roof of McClymonds High School on Thursday to demonstrate how a portable particulate monitor will help identify the heavy metal particulates West Oakland residents are breathing every day.

The machine and another like it will be situated around the school and other sites in the West Oakland community during the next month to gauge the amount and types of emissions coming from Custom Alloy and Scrap Sales (CASS), which makes aluminum parts from scrap metals.

They expect to capture aluminum particulates, but the machine is also testing for metals such as nickel and cadmium, a heavy metal that can cause serious health problems, said Denny Larson, executive director of Global Community Monitor, who is working with the students and residents to set up the tests.

Although the students had to be prodded at first by their teacher, Ina Bendich, to take that walk two years ago, they soon got into it, especially after they got some alarming results back from their first experiment: a test for lead dust collected in pie plates set outside the school's third-floor windows.

They began to study how environmental pollution can cause health problems, such as asthma and cancers. They formed a youth environmental group called West Oakland Urban Students Uprising against Pollution.

"My sister has asthma, and I can take this information and help educate my family and my peers," said Brittney Hamilton, 18, a senior at EXCEL. "I became aware that I can take action, and people are listening."

Ray Kidd, a resident who is part of a community watchdog group called West Oakland Air Monitors, credited the students with bringing the issue to the city's attention and getting the company to make some changes.

"I used to go by there on my bike all the time; the door would be open, and I would see fire inside," Kidd said. "You don't see that anymore."

World's largest plant to convert garbage gas to fuel to open soon in Altamont Pass

By Sophia Kazmi

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, July 5, 2009

LIVERMORE — Later this summer, gas produced by smelly garbage will be transformed into clean-burning fuel.

The Altamont Landfill, operated by Waste Management, is putting the finishing touches on a plant that will take landfill-generated methane gas and turn it into liquefied natural gas to fuel garbage-collection trucks.

The plant will be the first of its kind in the United States, and the largest in the world.

Rotting organic materials in the landfill produce a lot of gas, and "That gas is a valuable resource that we want to capture," said Kenneth Lewis, director of Waste Management's Bay Area landfill operations.

The \$15.5 million project is a joint venture that began last year between Waste Management and Linde North America, a subsidiary of the Linde Group, an international gas and engineering company.

Methane generated by decaying garbage is collected underground at the landfill in the Altamont Hills. The gas is usually flared away, but since 1989, the methane has been used to turn turbines on the landfill property to generate about 6.6 megawatts of electricity — enough to power 8,000 homes a day — and sold to PG&E.

Despite using it to create electricity, a lot of captured gas is still going to waste and needs to be flared off, Lewis said.

But that will change with the addition of the new plant.

Converting the gas to fuel requires rounds of filtering and cooling. Landfill gas is about 50 percent methane and 50 percent carbon dioxide, nitrogen and other particles. Through a series of tubes, the gas is filtered to just methane and cooled down, to the tune of -275 degrees, and it becomes a fuel source, Lewis said.

The plant will produce 13,000 gallons of fuel a day. Three tanks will store 45,000 gallons for the trucks to use. Statewide, the fuel is expected to power hundreds of collection trucks.

"It's no emissions at the landfill, and at the same time it's offsetting diesel on the highway," Lewis said.

The carbon dioxide derived from biological decomposition is considered carbon neutral, but the methane is considered to be a man-made greenhouse gas that is more than 20 times more potent to the ozone than carbon dioxide.

There is enough methane at the landfill, which has been in operation since 1980, to keep producing truck fuel for 30 years.

Other, similar projects are under way in the state. The state Air Resources Board has sponsored a project in Central California that takes the methane produced by cows and uses it to create compressed natural gas for vehicle use, said Air Resources spokesman Dimitri Stanich.

"There are other models of powering engines, and we're trying to encourage that technology," Stanich said.

There are plans to implement the facilities at other Waste Management landfills in the state, said Karen Stern, a Waste Management spokeswoman.

The company's goal is "to prove the model at this landfill and replicate it at the other landfills," Stern said.

The project will receive grant assistance from the state Integrated Waste Management Board, the state Air Resources Board and the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

Transit chief backs waterways for moving cargo

By Rachel Gordon, Chronicle Staff Writer
San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, July 3, 2009

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood made a brief stop at the Oakland waterfront Thursday to talk up support for "marine highways" - a program to move more cargo over the nation's waterways to reduce truck traffic and air pollution.

The idea has particular resonance in Oakland, where the diesel trucks that move goods to and from the Port of Oakland foul the air and add to health risks of nearby residents.

"A marine highway will get trucks off the road and [clean up the air](#)," LaHood said.

About 1,800 trucks pass through the port every day. A study released last year by the state Air Resources Board found that the diesel truck emissions were a significant culprit in putting nearby residents at greater risk of cancer. Children in West Oakland also have suffered a disproportionate rate of asthma, studies have found.

The port's governing board voted last month to ban so-called dirty trucks starting next year. Up to \$10 million was made available by the port and the Bay Area air quality district to equip diesel trucks with special filters to cut down on diesel pollution.

LaHood, who met briefly with reporters at Jack London Square, sat down beforehand with Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums, U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-California, and representatives from the Ports of Oakland, Sacramento and Stockton.

President Obama's transportation point man called for closer collaboration among the ports to expand use of the marine highway concept.

There are already more than two dozen marine highways operating in the United States, such as the corridor between Seattle and Alaska and in the gulf region. LaHood said Northern California could benefit, too, not just by helping to cut greenhouse-gas emissions but by cutting highway congestion.

Stimulus funding is available on a competitive basis to help ports make the necessary improvements needed to participate in a strong marine highway network, he said.

Dellums said Oakland is committed to working with Stockton and Sacramento move the project forward.

High 90s, poor air quality predicted for the holiday

By Sarah Frier

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, July 4, 2009

Expect a very warm Independence Day in Sacramento, with temperatures expected to reach 97 degrees.

National Weather Service Meteorologist Felix Garcia said this weekend will be hot and dry, with a weak 10-mph breeze from the south.

If you choose to celebrate outside this afternoon, wear sunscreen, Garcia said. The sun's harmful ultraviolet rays have been at stronger levels because of high atmospheric pressure.

"There's very little blockage of the sunlight and very little expectancy of getting shade except ozone protection," he said.

Come fireworks time, night lows will be in the 60s.

Air quality districts are warning that ozone pollutants are causing the air to be unhealthy for anybody with breathing problems.

After this weekend, temperatures will cool in Sacramento, dropping back to the mid-90s with nighttime lows in the mid-50s.

Expect cooler temperatures in the Lake Tahoe area this weekend, with a high of 74 degrees today.

Second Front Page

In the Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, July 06, 2009

Starting in 2012, new cars sold in California will have to have windows that reflect or absorb heat-producing rays from the sun. The California Air Resources Board adopted the regulation designed to keep cars cooler, increase their fuel efficiency and reduce global warming pollution. According to the CARB, cooler cars mean less air conditioning thereby increasing fuel efficiency and preventing about 700,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere in 2020 – roughly the equivalent of taking 140,000 cars off the road for a year.

Impacts of Pittsburg transit village plans at center of discussion

By Paul Burgarino, East County Times

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, July 6, 2009

Pittsburg residents will get a chance today to weigh in on plans to complement a future BART station with transit-oriented development.

Pittsburg leaders will consider certifying an environmental report for the Railroad Avenue Specific Plan at today's City Council meeting.

The city's goal is to create high-density housing, shops, parks and public space around the station in an area currently used for light-industrial business. The plan would also improve pedestrian, bus, bicycle and other transportation links between the station and surrounding community, said Leigha Schmidt, a city planner.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission requires 2,200 housing units be built within a half-mile of the eBART station, which will use diesel-powered trains to connect riders to the Pittsburg/Bay Point station. Guidelines set by the current draft plan would exceed that amount.

Currently, there are about 1,600 units in the Pittsburg study area.

Although the Railroad Avenue plan covers about 97 acres, development standards would change only by the transit village area near Bliss Avenue, the Civic Center area and some areas near the high school. Future projects might require further specific environmental study.

Environmental issues addressed in the report include air quality, transportation, housing density and the need for more public services such as schools and police to address growth.

The document found 15 potentially significant effects where mitigation measures could be added to the plan.

One of the concerns identified by both the public and reports is air quality for housing built close to the freeway and near the Civic Center.

The council will be presented options to implement the plan as is; reduce the planned residential density by 25 percent; remove housing units from being located within 500 feet of the freeway and away from City Hall; or not implement the project at all.

Although air quality effects are unavoidable, the plan is consistent with regionwide policies to support clustered development near transit hubs, Schmidt said. Her staff report said because of changing energy efficiency relating to emissions, "it is likely (the report) is conservative in the air quality estimates of impacts."

A transit village could also reduce traffic congestion and idling cars on Highway 4, the report said.

Although pleased with some elements of the plan, Chris Schildt, of the transportation advocacy group TransForm, is concerned about pedestrian safety. Parts of sidewalks where people walk to the station platform on Railroad Avenue are too narrow, poorly lit and not designed to scale, she said.

Schildt suggests the plan look at wider sidewalks and better lighting and design. The eBART station would have stairs and elevators on both sides of Railroad Avenue.

"There's still some room for improvement," Schildt said.

The city has held several public meetings on the plan since 2006. Concerns raised included traffic flow during commute hours, parking and relocation of some older existing businesses.

In late 2006, Pittsburg offered to fund the eBART station using redevelopment funds. The city and BART are still negotiating terms for a possible agreement, City Manager Marc Grisham said. The station's cost is estimated at around \$21 million, said Ellen Smith, an eBART project manager.

The eBART project will happen in conjunction with widening Highway 4, and is expected to be completed by 2015.

Judge: Chevron must halt Richmond expansion

By David R. Baker, Chronicle Staff Writer
San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, July 3, 2009

Martinez -- A judge has ordered Chevron Corp. to stop work on its controversial oil refinery expansion in Richmond, handing environmentalists their biggest victory in a long fight over the project.

Contra Costa County Superior Court Judge Barbara Zuniga gave Chevron 60 days to wind up work on the project, which would have given the 107-year-old refinery greater flexibility to process different types of crude oil. Zuniga's orders, dated Wednesday, were released Thursday.

Her ruling doesn't kill the upgrade project outright. But before it could proceed, Chevron would need a new environmental impact report and a new permit from the Richmond City Council, which narrowly approved the project last year. Zuniga ruled last month that the original environmental report didn't answer key questions, siding with environmental and community groups that had sued to stop the expansion.

"The court held Big Oil accountable," said Will Rostov, staff attorney for Earthjustice, one of the groups involved in the suit. "The judge got it."

The victory, however, comes at a cost.

San Ramon's Chevron began the upgrades in September, bringing in more than 1,000 workers for the task. The company laid off 100 of those workers Thursday and will cut more in the coming weeks.

"While we believe the court's decision is wrong, we will begin demobilizing," said Chevron spokesman Brent Tippen. "For contract workers, there will be no project to work on until this is resolved."

The company has not given up on revamping the refinery, Tippen said. But scrapping the upgrade would cost workers \$50 million to \$75 million in lost income, he said.

In addition, the city would lose \$61 million that Chevron pledged to community programs as part of the project's approval, Tippen said.

"As of right now, we are reviewing our options and will work with the city to find a path forward," Tippen said.

The groups suing Chevron want the workers retained until construction can begin again.

They doubt that the oil company, America's second largest, will walk away from the project. Instead, they want Chevron to agree to limits on the use of heavier grades of crude oil at the refinery, grades they fear could [produce more air pollution](#).

"The workers shouldn't pay for Chevron's mistake," said Greg Karras, senior scientist for Communities for a Better Environment, another of the suit's plaintiffs. "The real solution is to replace the refinery's ancient equipment. Design it right, design it for the same quality of oil."

Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin echoed that point. "We can get a good project, and hopefully this ruling will help us do that."

The fight over the refinery has focused on the types of oil processed there. But it has also involved long-simmering resentment among the refinery's neighbors, who say pollution from the aging facility threatens their health.

Chevron describes the project as an important upgrade. Although the refinery would still process the same amount of crude oil, it would be able to make about 7 percent more gasoline from that oil.

The refinery would still use the same kinds of crude oil that it does now, according to the company. The four-year upgrade, however, would let the refinery process larger amounts of the heavier grades of crude already used there.

Opponents consider that description a smokescreen. They say the project's true intention is to handle even heavier grades of crude oil, grades that contain higher levels of toxins such as mercury and can lead to more air pollution.

"This is a trend across the country," said Rostov. "We're running out of the good stuff and using more of the dirtier oil."

Last month, Zuniga ruled that the project's environmental report was too vague about the types of oil that would be processed after the upgrade was complete.

City Councilman Jim Rogers said Thursday that the judge's ruling could finally bring the opposing sides to a compromise. Last year, he proposed that the project go forward under the condition that an independent party would sample air pollution near the refinery to make sure it didn't get worse after the upgrade. He plans to pursue that idea again.

"My feeling is, out of crisis comes opportunity, perhaps the opportunity for both sides to agree to monitor the air," Rogers said. "And if it's dirtier, then Chevron would not get to run the heavier, dirtier crude. They wouldn't have to rip out the machinery and scrap it; they just couldn't use the dirtier crude."

Climate battle moves to the Senate

Obama faces calls for more concessions, including offshore drilling, in global warming legislation.

By Jim Tankersley

LA Times, Monday, July 6, 2009

Reporting from Washington -- President Obama's landmark energy and global warming bill squeaked through the House only after the White House made dozens of concessions to coal, manufacturing and other interests.

Now, as the battle moves to the Senate, Obama faces demands for even more concessions -- including pressure to open the nation's coastlines to offshore oil and gas drilling.

The Senate also will take up a series of controversial issues that were glossed over or omitted from the House legislation. Among them: giving the government sweeping powers to approve thousands of miles of new transmission lines to carry electric power to coastal cities from wind turbines in the upper Midwest and solar power generators in the Southwest, regardless of local objections.

Aware of the challenge, Obama repeatedly has called attention to the House achievement and urged the Senate to keep up the momentum.

"There are going to be a series of tough negotiations," he said last week. "But I think the ability of the House to move forward is going to be a prod for the Senate toward action."

Even so, with Republicans forming a near-solid phalanx of opposition and many Democrats concerned about the effects of specific sections of the bill on their constituents, the prospect is for a long, slow legislative process.

Senate leaders say they will benefit from lessons learned from the way House leaders built their majority. Chief among them: the need to cut specific deals to ease the effects of [new emissions restrictions](#) -- which could translate into higher costs for businesses and rising prices for consumers -- in particular parts of the country.

"We need to absolutely work this bill one on one," said Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who chairs the Environment and Public Works Committee that is drafting emissions limits, "because everybody's got different passions about it, different feelings about it, different hopes about it, different fears about it."

Making those deals is harder in the Senate than in the House, some analysts say.

"In the House, you can move blocks of votes," said Daniel Weiss, a senior fellow at the liberal Center for American Progress who works on global warming issues. "In the Senate, it's hand-to-hand combat."

Although a climate bill is expected to be hundreds of pages long, it will boil down to an attempt to start weaning the U.S. economy from dependence on fossil fuels.

The centerpiece is the so-called cap-and-trade system, which would set limits on carbon dioxide and other emissions that scientists say are a major factor in global warming. The allowed level of such emissions would decline over time. And major polluters, such as power plants and factories, would be required to obtain permits to cover their emissions as a spur to reducing pollution.

The original idea was that the government would sell the permits, but the House voted to give out many of them free to ease the economic effects.

The Senate bill also is likely to include a variety of provisions designed to encourage development of energy sources, including wind and solar power. Those could include financial and legal provisions to speed construction of transmission lines to move power from the remote deserts and plains -- where it's easily produced -- to coastal cities where it's needed.

The quest for new energy sources is expected to reopen the politically explosive issue of offshore drilling.

Looming over all the provisions is cost -- a focal point of Republican attacks.

"The public is especially wary of passing this during a major recession, and public skepticism is growing about the man-made climate fears," said Marc Morano, editor of the global-warming-skeptic website ClimateDepot.com.

Democrats and the two independents who caucus with them control 60 Senate seats. But more than a dozen have expressed concern over costs. They include Democrats from industry-heavy Ohio and Michigan, coal-dependent Indiana and oil-rich Louisiana.

Only a few Republicans appear open to emissions limits, notably two moderates from Maine -- Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia J. Snowe -- and Sen. John McCain of Arizona, who championed emissions limits in his presidential campaign (though he has expressed reservations about the House bill).

The Senate bill will emerge from several committees -- including the finance, foreign relations, commerce and agriculture committees -- with dramatically different memberships and priorities.

The energy committee already has approved its chunk with wide bipartisan support. It includes a requirement to produce more electricity from renewable sources, but also expands drilling -- a possible deal-breaker for environmentalists.

Boxer's committee will center its work on cap and trade. The House bill would cut U.S. emissions by 17% below 2005 levels by 2020 and 83% by 2050. Environmentalists expect Boxer, who said she was "looking closely" at those limits, to strengthen them.

House climate bill wouldn't cut U.S. oil dependence much

By Renee Schoof- McClatchy Newspapers
Modesto Bee, Friday, July 3, 2009

WASHINGTON - Despite its title as the "American Clean Energy and Security Act," the energy and climate bill that the House of Representatives passed recently takes only a modest step toward reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil.

Two studies project that the legislation would cut oil use in the future, but not enough to make much of a dent in dependence on oil from unstable or unfriendly foreign suppliers. Some experts say that other steps will be needed to cut U.S. oil use significantly.

The nonprofit American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy examined the bill's efficiency provisions and concluded that they would save 1.4 million barrels of oil per day in 2030. That's roughly 10 percent of the projected use of 14.3 million barrels a day in that year, according to the government's Energy Information Administration.

The Environmental Protection Agency put the oil savings at 700,000 barrels a day by 2030. The EPA looked mainly at the bill's terms that would put a declining cap on the amount of emissions of heat-trapping gases allowed each year and create a pollution-permit trading system.

EPA's analysis showed only a modest decrease because the bill would have little impact on the price of gasoline - and thus little impact on people's driving behavior and choice of cars. EPA estimated that gasoline prices would go up about 25 cents a gallon in 2030 as a result of the bill.

EPA also projected that U.S. oil use would hold fairly steady from now to 2050.

The House-passed climate legislation focuses primarily on electricity generation. Its backers said they sought the quickest and cheapest ways to bring down U.S. emissions to 83 percent below 2005 levels by 2050.

U.S. electricity generation is half from coal and the rest mostly from nuclear energy, hydro and renewable energy. Only about 2 percent is from oil.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office said that the bill, when combined with the 2007 energy bill and the president's fuel efficiency plan, would cut the use of oil by 5 million barrels a day in 2030.

The Rocky Mountain Institute, a nonprofit energy policy center, has argued that the climate bill would help establish clean sources of electricity, but wouldn't solve the problem of U.S. oil dependence.

Amory Lovins, an energy expert who leads RMI, said he didn't object to the House bill's focus on climate, but he argued that other policies are needed to break dependence on oil. And a reduction of oil use would sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions, he added.

"We just want to make sure the policy apparatus can walk and chew gum at the same time - that by focusing on climate, which is an urgent issue, it does not delay similarly urgent consideration of breaking oil dependence," he said.

Lovins argues that energy efficiency and greater use of natural gas and biofuels not related to food could displace much U.S. oil use.

A move away from oil could be speeded up with policies like "feebates" for cars: People who buy inefficient cars would pay a fee, and those who buy more efficient ones would get a rebate. Lovins said such a program in France has been a "stunning success" in getting people to buy fuel-efficient cars.

The Obama administration has shifted U.S. energy policy's emphasis to efficiency and renewable energy "to a much greater extent than we've seen previously," Lovins added. "I think that ultimately will bear fruit for getting us off oil as well as reducing carbon emissions. But this does take a more specific focus on oil dependence than what we've gotten in the climate bill."

Clark County issues air quality advisory

The Associated Press
Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, July 2, 2009

LAS VEGAS -- Clark County officials have issued an air quality advisory for smoke and ozone that could come from Fourth of July fireworks this weekend.

Officials from the county's Department of Air Quality and Environmental Management say smoke from fireworks and barbecues could add fine dust particles to the air that create ozone when cooked by sunlight.

Soot and ozone can aggravate those with respiratory diseases and ozone can affect even healthy people.

Older Cars Fouling Region's Air Quality Agency Study Links Recession, Pollution

By Katherine Shaver
Washington Post, Saturday, July 4, 2009

The recession is contributing to higher levels of air pollution in the Washington area as new car sales plummet and older, dirtier vehicles remain on the road longer, according to a recent study by regional planners.

The trend is expected to show up across the country as transportation planners use vehicle registration data collected after the economy soured to adjust local air quality forecasts required by federal law. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments is believed to be the first planning agency to analyze that data.

Vehicles on the road in the Washington area are an average of six months older than they were in 2005. The increase, from about 7.9 to 8.4 years, is enough to push the region perilously close to violating its limits for traffic-related pollutants, according to the study.

"If you trade in a 1995 Jeep Cherokee for a new one, that's a big difference in emissions," said Ronald F. Kirby, COG's transportation planning director. "We can't keep emissions going down unless we get newer vehicles in the fleet."

Last month, President Obama signed "cash for clunkers" legislation that will provide as much as \$4,500 to people who trade in older, less fuel-efficient vehicles to buy or lease ones that get better gas mileage. The measure, which some critics said does not do enough to cut carbon emissions, is intended to help the auto industry while putting cleaner cars and trucks on the road.

In the Washington area, tailpipe emissions next year will be as much as 7.5 percent higher than projected in forecasts conducted last year, according to COG's analysis. The increase in vehicle age overwhelmed changes friendly to the environment, such as an increase in hybrid vehicles and a move away from gas-guzzling sport-utility vehicles toward smaller and relatively fuel-efficient passenger cars, the study found.

Kirby said he was particularly troubled that aging vehicles are predicted to cause increased emissions even as motorists are expected to cut their driving by 2.5 percent, in part because of higher unemployment. The finding is at odds with a basic tenet of transportation planning, that tailpipe emissions drop when people drive less.

Rich Denbow, director of technical programs for the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, said the COG study is the first in the country to document the connection between older vehicles and worsening air pollution. However, Denbow said, he expects other areas will find the same problem when they update their air quality forecasts.

"We're the first ones to see it, but I think it will be a national issue," said Denbow, whose organization is based in the District. "Our economy is better than a lot of others, so the [older vehicle] problem isn't as bad here as it will be in other areas."

Michael Replogle, transportation director for the Environmental Defense Fund, said he is concerned that the problem is even worse than COG projected. The computer models that Kirby's staff used have been found to project less pollution than a newer model that planning agencies will begin using in the near future, he said.

Transportation planners said they hope new car sales will rebound as the economy does, but Replogle said he thinks the nation's vehicle fleet will remain on the older side because so much shopping in recent years was fueled by cheap credit.

This is a critical time, transportation planners said, because tighter limits on tailpipe emissions took effect in 2004 and 2007. Having an average vehicle age of more than eight years means that many of those on the road are higher-polluting.

"We're at a point now that when an older vehicle turns over, we see dramatic improvements" in pollutants, Kirby said. "How can you expect us to meet our targets for emissions when we have no control over the economy and the rate at which people buy new vehicles?"

Kirby said computer models most recently showed that volatile organic compounds are predicted to increase an additional 6.6 percent and nitrogen oxides an additional 7.5 percent in 2010, when compared with last year's forecasts. The two pollutants contribute to unhealthy levels of ground-level ozone that on Code Red days prompt public officials to advise the elderly, children and people with respiratory or heart problems to remain indoors.

Fine particulate matter, a pollutant that can cause serious health problems when it gets into the lungs and bloodstream, is expected to increase an additional 1.3 percent over last year's predictions, the COG study found.

The federal Clean Air Act requires metropolitan areas to show that they will remain within their pollution limits when emissions from existing traffic are combined with those forecast to come from future road and transit projects. Exceeding those limits can cost a region money for new transportation projects. The Washington area is required to reduce emissions from vehicles, power plants and other sources because it has failed to meet federal ozone standards for decades.

Kirby said his staff began paying closer attention to the vehicles on local roads after they discovered 10 years ago that the growing popularity of SUVs and the increase in miles driven could cause the region to violate its emissions limits. To prevent the loss of federal transportation funding, Washington area local governments have spent \$38 million this decade to curb exhaust-related pollution.

The region won't exceed its limits for traffic-related pollutants in 2010, Kirby said, but the computer models showed it will come "within an eyelash" of doing so.

Joan Rohlfs, chief of air quality planning for COG, said she is most concerned about pollution from diesel trucks, which emit the dirtiest exhaust and are driven longer than passenger cars.

"Anything that contributes to pollution is not good for anyone's health," Rohlfs said.

The number of hybrid vehicles in the area jumped to 41,729 in 2008, from 11,843 in 2005, but they still make up a minuscule percentage of the overall fleet. Hybrids account for 1.5 percent of vehicles on Northern Virginia and District roads and 0.8 percent on roads in the Maryland suburbs, according to the COG analysis.

Clashes at protest vs US base expansion in Italy

By Ariel David, The Associated Press

In the San Diego Union-Tribune, Sat., July 4, 2009

APROME — Protesters clashed with police at a demonstration Saturday against the planned expansion of an airport and U.S. military base in the northern city of Vicenza.

Demonstrators wearing helmets and carrying plastic shields threw stones and other objects at officers guarding a bridge on the route of the protest. Police fired tear gas canisters and clubbed some demonstrators, but no injuries were immediately reported.

Several thousand protesters, many from other Italian cities, converged on Vicenza to march against the expansion of the Dal Molin airport. They beat drums and carried rainbow peace flags, caricatures of President Barack Obama and banners that read "No Dal Molin."

The plan would allow the transfer of four U.S. battalions from Germany, raising the number of active duty personnel in Vicenza to 5,000 from about 2,900 already stationed at the Ederle base on the other side of town.

The move is part of the U.S. Army's plans to transform itself into a lighter, more mobile force. Under the plans, elements of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade, a rapid reaction unit now spread between Italy and Germany, would be united.

The staunchly pro-American conservative administration of Premier Silvio Berlusconi has pushed ahead with the expansion, which also was approved by his center-left predecessor, Romano Prodi, despite anger from his Communist and Greens allies.

Construction is scheduled to be completed by 2011.

Some residents, far left groups and environmentalists have been protesting the expansion for years, saying it would increase traffic; noise and air pollution; deplete local resources, including water and gas; and raise the risk of terrorist attacks.

Protests have been frequent in the city of 110,000, and Saturday's demonstration was staged to coincide with July 4, in what organizers said would mark an "Independence Day" from the U.S. base.

The march also was seen as a test of other protests that are planned against next week's Group of Eight summit in L'Aquila.

The government moved the meeting from the posh Sardinian island of La Maddalena to the central Italian city after it was hit by a devastating earthquake in April.

Berlusconi said the move sought to draw attention to the population's plight and limit the possibility of violence because protesters would not dare vandalize the stricken city. Last time Italy hosted the G-8 summit, in 2001, violent clashes left one protester dead and devastated the port city of Genoa.

The U.S. Embassy in Italy has issued a warning to Americans to exercise caution while traveling through Italy during the summit, particularly in areas like Rome and L'Aquila where several demonstrations are planned.

Sarkozy, Brown push against tax havens

By Greg Keller Associated Press

In the San Francisco Chronicle, Monday, July 6, 2009

EVIAN, France (AP) --The leaders of France and Britain pushed Monday for ambitious targets for tackling climate change and cracking down on uncooperative tax havens, ahead of upcoming meetings with other heads of state this week and in September.

The two leaders showed little sign of headway, however, on a stalled European military cargo plane project or defusing tensions over illegal immigrants crossing the English Channel from France to Britain.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said he and French President Nicolas Sarkozy agreed at a summit in this Alpine resort to call for a March 2010 deadline for sanctions against tax havens that fail to bring their transparency up to international standards.

"The world should be in no doubt that the writing is on the wall for tax havens," Brown said. "Tax transparency, full exchange of tax information and reducing tax avoidance are crucial for the health of the global economy," Brown said.

Sanctions under consideration include cutting investment, imposing taxes on funds held in tax havens, and the withdrawal of aid, Brown said.

Neither leader named specific tax havens. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has named several countries, including Switzerland and Liechtenstein, on a so-called "gray list" of tax havens that have yet to implement commitments to accept new information-exchange standards.

Sarkozy and a half-dozen government ministers met with Brown and their counterparts just two days before they join world leaders from the United States, Russia, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada for a Group of Eight summit in L'Aquila, Italy.

The two men discussed their G-8 strategies and a September meeting in Pittsburgh of the Group of 20 developed and developing countries. Sarkozy said he and Brown would insist on tangible, timely results at the G-20.

"We won't be satisfied with very long-term goals," Sarkozy said, "we want Pittsburgh's targets to be as ambitious" as those set out at April's G-20 meeting in London, Sarkozy said.

Sarkozy and Brown spent much of their approximately 90-minute meeting discussing efforts to combat climate change, including so-called carbon taxes on goods from heavily polluting companies, Brown said.

Both leaders called for progress on the issue ahead of a December climate change conference in Copenhagen, where the United Nations aims to conclude a new, worldwide climate pact.

"I don't want the world to be set back at Copenhagen," Brown said. "The failure to reach agreement there will be seen as a huge blow to the environmental movement and to the ability of the world to work together on other issues."

The overall aim of the treaty is to cut greenhouse gas emissions by between 25 and 40 percent from 1990 levels starting in 2012.

The 27-nation European Union already has agreed to [reduce CO2 emissions](#) by 20 percent of 1990 levels by 2020 — a number that could be increased to 30 percent if other countries sign on.

Sarkozy and Brown also called for talks with oil producing countries on ways to reduce the volatility of oil prices, which plunged from around \$147 a barrel last July to \$32 late last year, then to \$73 last week.

"The most important commodity the world needs is one of the most volatile and unstable," Brown said. "We have to look at how we can change this."

The leaders agreed that G8 and G20 leaders "have got to take seriously some of the warning signals that exist in the world economy," and finish reforms that were agreed at the last G20 meeting in London, Brown said.

"We have to increase bank lending, and both of us are worried that banks have yet to respond in full to the situation we have where industries and sectors are calling for help from the banks," Brown added.

Neither leader said much about their talks on Europe's long-delayed and loss-making A400M military transport plane.

In a joint statement released later, the two leaders said they are "committed to finding a positive outcome for the renegotiation of the A400M program."

Airbus and parent company EADS, which are developing the aircraft, must "bear the consequences of the program delays and contribute to compensating for the resulting capability deficit," according to the statement.

The A400M transporter program was launched in 2003 with an order for 180 planes from seven governments — Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain and Turkey.

But the manufacturer, European aerospace giant EADS, missed a March 31 contractual deadline for the first flight, and it could have to repay as much as euro5.7 billion (\$8 billion) to governments if the project were canceled.

EU: China, India must make emissions cuts

By Robert Wielaard, Associated Press Writer

In the San Francisco Chronicle, Thursday, July 2, 2009

STOCKHOLM, (AP) --The chances of concluding a new global climate change pact remain dim unless China, India and Brazil make significant [cuts in carbon dioxide emissions](#) as well a senior Swedish climate change official said Thursday.

Lars-Erik Liljelund, special climate change adviser to the Swedish government, said cuts from richer countries in the 27-nation bloc or planned cuts in the United States will not be enough to meet aims to cut at least 25 percent of emission from 1990 levels.

"The problem at the moment is that if you take the contributions made so far by the United States, the European Union and Japan then we don't come up to that minus 25 percent," he told reporters. He said cuts from those richer countries and regions would only reach two-thirds of that minimum target.

"We will have serious problems if China, India, South Africa and Brazil" also do not pitch in, said Liljelund. "We are entering a climate crisis."

Those countries were exempt under the 1997 Kyoto protocol climate change pact which runs out in 2012.

Sweden, which holds the EU presidency, is in charge of leading the European position at U.N. climate change negotiations which aim to conclude a new, worldwide climate change pact in Copenhagen in December.

Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt said getting a new emissions cutting accord will be his top priority as EU president.

The new agreement — a successor to the 1997 Kyoto protocol — is controversial because key industrial polluters such as the United States and Europe want newly emerging economies to also help cut global gas emissions.

The overall aim of the successor treaty is to cut greenhouse gas emissions by between 25 and 40 percent from 1990 levels starting in 2012.

The 27-nation EU has already agreed to reduce CO2 emissions by 20 percent of 1990 levels by 2020 — a number that could be increased to 30 percent if other countries sign on.

The United States, which walked away from the Kyoto agreement, has changed its course under President Barack Obama. But European official say proposed cutbacks now being considered by U.S. lawmakers are insufficient.

A U.S. Congress bill approved last week by the House of Representatives would cut emissions by 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020, ignoring the 1990-2005 period during which U.S. emissions rose by 15 percent according to EU data.

[Editorial in the NY Times, Saturday, July 4, 2009](#)

California Rules

We knew it was coming, but the event is still worth celebrating as further evidence of the strides this country has taken, since the Bush administration left town, to confront the problems of oil dependency and global warming. On Tuesday, the Environmental Protection Agency formally

granted California the permission it had been seeking for seven years to enforce its own landmark rules aimed at cutting [greenhouse gas emissions](#) from new motor vehicles.

President Obama forecast this decision in May when he announced a broad agreement to harmonize the obligations of California, the E.P.A. and the federal Department of Transportation. California would get the waiver it needed to enforce its rules. The E.P.A. would set new vehicle emissions standards under the Clean Air Act, as mandated by the Supreme Court. And the Transportation Department would set new vehicle mileage standards as required by Congress.

Armed with one set of coherent national standards, all three would come out in the same place, with cars, pickups and S.U.V.'s becoming increasingly more fuel efficient beginning with the 2012 model year and, by 2016, producing 30 percent less greenhouse gas emissions than they do now. The transportation sector over all produces about one-third of the nation's greenhouse gases.

California started all this. Long an innovator on clean air issues, the state approved the new standards in 2002. Over time, 14 other states and the District of Columbia said they would replicate California's program once it won approval. But the car companies fought the program relentlessly in the courts and in Congress, and the Bush E.P.A. denied the waiver in 2008. Mr. Obama turned things around, and even the car companies — in no shape for protracted legal fights — have signed on.

The E.P.A. and the Transportation Department now must finish the paperwork on the greenhouse gas and mileage standards for the 2012 to 2016 models so as to extend the benefits of California's rules nationwide. The result should be win-win-win — for consumers at the pump, for the auto companies, and for the atmosphere.

[Opinion in the Fresno Bee on Friday, July 03, 2009:](#)

Empowering Congress helps Obama win

By David Brooks

Freud said we're forever changed by the traumas of our youth, and so it is with the Democrats and Clintoncare. Even as you watch the leading Democrats today in their moment of glory, you can still see wounds caused by the defeat of the Clinton health care initiative.

You see the psychic reactions and the scars and the lessons they have taken away so that sort of debacle never happens again.

The first lesson they have learned is that domestic policymaking should never be dictated from the White House. The Clinton health initiative was hatched in the executive branch and unleashed on Congress. So the Obama administration is doing the opposite, handing Congress working control of every major piece of legislation.

Congress wrote the stimulus package. Congress wrote the cap-and-trade bill. Congress is writing the health care bill. The House and Senate chairmen make more decisions on these issues than anybody on the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Second, Democrats learned never to go to war against the combined forces of corporate America. Today, whether it is on the stimulus, on health care or any other issue, the Obama administration and the congressional leadership go out of their way to court corporate interests, to win corporate support and to at least divide corporate opposition.

Third, the Clintoncare collapse and the ensuing decade in the wilderness drove home the costs of failure. This has produced a Vince Lombardi attitude toward winning. There are limits, of course, but leaders in Congress and in the administration seem open to nearly any idea so long as it will lead to passing legislation.

On health care, the administration would like a strong public plan, but it is evidently open to a weak one. It is on record against taxing health benefits, but it is clearly willing to tax them. It will do what it takes to pass a bill.

All of this has produced a ruthlessly pragmatic victory machine.

Last week, Democrats were able to pass a politically treacherous cap-and-trade bill out of the House. The Democratic leaders were able to let 44 members vote "no" and still bribe/bully/cajole enough of their colleagues to get a win. This was an impressive achievement, and a harbinger for health care and other battles to come.

But the new approach comes with its own shortcomings. To understand them, we have to distinguish between two types of pragmatism. There is legislative pragmatism -- writing bills that can pass. Then there is policy pragmatism -- creating programs that work. These two pragmatisms are in tension, and in their current frame of mind, Democrats often put the former before the latter.

On the stimulus bill, the Democratic committee chairmen wrote a sprawling bill that incorporated the diverse wishes of hundreds of members and interest groups. But as they did so, the bill had less and less to do with stimulus. Only about 40% of the money in the bill was truly stimulative, and that money was not designed to be spent quickly. For example, according to the Congressional Budget Office, only 11 percent of the discretionary spending in the stimulus will be disbursed by the end of the fiscal year. The bill passed, but it is not doing much to create jobs this year and it will not do nearly as much as it could to create jobs in 2010.

On cap and trade, the House chairmen took a relatively clean though politically difficult idea -- [auctioning off pollution permits](#) -- and they transformed it into a morass of corporate giveaways that make the stimulus bill look parsimonious. Permits would now be given to well-connected companies. Utilities and agribusiness would be rolling in government-generated profits.

Thousands of goodies were thrown into the 1,201-page bill to win votes.

The bill passed the House, but would it actually reduce emissions? It's impossible to know. It contains so many complex market interventions that only a fantasist could confidently predict its effects. A few years ago the European Union passed a cap-and-trade system, but because it was so shot through with special-interest caveats, emissions actually rose.

On health care, too, the complicated job of getting a bill that can pass is taking priority over the complicated task of creating a program that can work. Dozens of different ideas are being added, watered down or merged together in order to cobble together a majority. But will the logrolling produce a sustainable health system that controls costs and actually hangs together?

The great paradox of the age is that Barack Obama, the most riveting of recent presidents, is leading us into an era of congressional dominance. And congressional governance is a haven for special-interest pleading and venal logrolling.

When the executive branch is dominant you often get coherent proposals that may not pass. When Congress is dominant, as now, you get politically viable mishmashes that don't necessarily make sense.