

Ag barred from burning on no-burn days

By Stacey Shepard, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Feb. 28, 2009

Residents who bristle at being told they can't use their fireplace on no-burn days may find some comfort in knowing the restrictions are a bit more equitable now.

A double standard that allowed valley farmers to burn agricultural waste on days when it was prohibited to light a fireplace was eliminated in January, air district officials said this week.

"We've changed our policies to prevent that from happening," Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Sadredin said the change came after *The Californian* published a story in early January that found farmers were allowed to burn agricultural waste — in some cases hundreds of acres of it — on days when fireplace burning was prohibited.

Also in response to the story, state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, introduced a bill Thursday that would make the policy law.

Florez said it's important because an administrative policy could be reversed by new air district officials.

"If (the air district) has already implemented it, then we fully expect them to support our bill," Florez said.

The air district previously said it allowed ag burns on some fireplace no-burn days because they took place in remote areas and the district preferred smaller, frequent ag burns rather than larger fires and more smoke.

"We were shocked when we read some of the responses from the air board," Florez said.

"It's the entire air basin we're worried about and it doesn't matter where (the smoke) originates, it ends up keeping our numbers at a point where we're penalized," he said, referring to national air quality standards for fine particulate pollution the valley has not met. Smoke is considered a key source of the pollution.

Sadredin said there have been just three or four days since the policy change when farmers could have burned on a residential no-burn day. He said the district has received no complaints from farmers about the new policy.

No-burn season ends

Many will be happy to say good riddance as the valley air district's no-burn season ends Saturday.

No-burn days in Kern County shot up to 54 this season from 12 last season after the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District strengthened the fireplace rule this fall.

Kern had the most no-burn days of all eight counties in the valley air district's jurisdiction. The next highest was Fresno with 46.

The no-burn season runs from Nov. 1 to the end of February. A fireplace prohibition is called on days when air quality is forecasted to be in the unhealthy range. Violators can be fined.

While Kern had it bad, other areas also felt the pain, particularly in northern counties, which typically have better air quality than the southern parts of the valley.

Merced County, for example, went from no fireplace prohibitions in 2007-08 to 34 this season.

The fireplace rule was tightened to help the valley comply with federal standards for fine particular pollution.

Smog: Fireplace bans in overdrive this winter

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Sat., Feb. 28, 2009

The good news for those who love to burn wood in fireplaces: Burning bans are over for the winter.

The bad news: There were more burning bans this winter than the previous four winters combined.

Fireplace burning bans increased almost eight fold Fresno County -- a reflection of a much tougher standard.

Citations for burning on ban days more than tripled. All eight counties had skyrocketing increases in both categories.

Did the air get dramatically better? I haven't yet tracked down the possible improvement in PM-2.5 conditions around the Valley's cites. But I will next week when I write more in depth about it.

For now, let's get a closer look at those numbers, because this is truly a wow kind of thing.

Last winter, there were 30 burning bans. This winter: 296. That's nearly a 10-fold increase.

Last winter, there were 87 violation notices written. This winter: 409.

No county had fewer than 24 ban days -- that was San Joaquin where 27 violation notices were written. Interesting, Kings County had the third-highest total of ban days with 47, but only 10 violation notices were written.

Kern County had the highest number of ban days: 54. But it had only 85 violation notices. Fresno County, meanwhile, had 46 ban days and a whopping 126 citations.

Is anybody breathing easier?

Smog: Another vote for light rail

By Mark Grossi, FresnoBee.com, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009

Reader Alan Kandel e-mailed about a PBX presentation that profiled a light rail system in Charlotte, N.C., making the point that light rail leaves less of a carbon footprint than vehicles transporting 18,000 week-day riders. It's one reason he supports light rail here.

He also said the PBS story discussed how the system "helped revitalize neighborhoods long abandoned and blighted and, spurred tremendous development potential and opportunity all built up around this line, and thus transformed a community."

Says Kandel: "This is particularly noteworthy from where I sit because not only is air pollution brought into the spotlight, but with the recent attention being paid to the further disappearance of high-quality farmland, due to so-called urbanization, there is a tug-o-war going on in Fresno County.

"On one side the necessity of feeding, fueling (via bio-fuels) and clothing (via cotton crops) the world and, on the opposite side providing adequate and suitable, if not affordable, housing for a growing population."

"My feeling is ... a viable way to achieve a reduction in suburban sprawl and at the same time reduce air pollution and get people excited about walkable, bikeable, transit-oriented communities, is through light rail transit."

Why not light rail here?

Irksome to some, pollution inspectors in San Joaquin County say they work to clean our air

It's a low-key agency with a big budget and an increasing role in valley life

By Andrew Adams

Lodi News-Sentinel, Saturday, Feb. 28, 2009

In late November, an inspector with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District cruised through a neighborhood of stately homes north of Turner Road.

It was a Tuesday afternoon at 2:30 p.m., and the inspector noted that smoke was issuing from the chimney of a home at the corner of Junewood Drive. As that day in November was an official "no-burn" day, the inspector then mailed off a "notice of violation" that the homeowner had broken air regulations by having a fire and was therefore required to pay a \$50 fine.

Three months later, Adam Dados, who lives in that home on Junewood Drive, was dismayed and not just a little angry to learn from a reporter that the district had issued such a violation.

On Friday, Dados said in no uncertain terms where the inspectors could go and what they could do to themselves.

"I'll spend \$500 to fight them in court before I pay them \$50," Dados said. "All I can tell the air district is go file a charge with the DA. I want to see my accuser in court."

Low-key but growing agency

Dados is one of roughly 400 residents cited during the wood burning season, which ends today. The citations are issued by inspectors from the pollution district. It's a somewhat low-profile agency playing an increasingly larger — some say more intrusive — role in the lives of San Joaquin Valley residents. It is the air pollution district that tells people which days they can or cannot have a fire in their fireplace. It is the district that issues citations, and the district that divvies up millions in incentives to clean up the air.

And district officials stress that Valley air, some of the worst in the nation, needs to get cleaned up.

During the winter, they say, smoke from wood fires is one of the leading sources of air pollutants.

Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the district, said smoke inhalation causes heart disease and can aggravate respiratory conditions such as asthma. The smoke from fires spreads "particulate matter" into the air. These particles are so small they can actually enter the blood stream through the lungs, which is why it's so detrimental to heart health.

The district is charged with setting and enforcing regulations set by the state and federal government for sources of air pollution. These sources include factories, farms and homes.

"Studies have shown that our wintertime air quality has a great deal to do with residential wood burning," Presto said.

The district's enforcement season for wood burning begins in November. During this past season, there were a total of 409 violations in the eight-county district during the four-month period, which saw an average of 9 no-burn days per month.

In San Joaquin County, a total of 27 people received violations and there were 21 no-burn days.

In Lodi, two homeowners received violations for having a fire on the wrong day. Dados was one, though he was not aware of the violation before Friday because the notice had been sent to his sister, Angie Melas.

She, too, questioned the district's action.

"I don't believe it. You know, come on," she said before adding there are far more serious causes of air pollution than residential chimneys.

The other violation went to a Lodi woman who owns a rental home on El Dorado Avenue in Lodi. The violation occurred at the rental, but the ticket was issued to the property owner. The woman did not reply to a request for comment.

'There is no knocking on doors'

The district has three 1-800 numbers for complaints in all of its eight counties. Tipsters are kept anonymous and, as the district's inspectors never contact homeowners directly, the first time a homeowner learns of a violation is through the mail.

Presto said that on no-burn days, district inspectors will respond to complaints, and if they find a home with a smoky chimney, they'll write up a violation.

"There is no knocking on doors; we don't approach anybody," Presto said.

A second violation has a \$150 fine, and a third fine — and any after that — costs \$1,000.

"In general, residents have been very cooperative with the rule," Presto said.

The district has gone to great lengths to publicize its no-burn restrictions, he said, with commercials, press releases and a Web site and toll-free number to find out if a wood fire is permitted.

If a homeowner has no other means to heat their home aside from a fireplace, they can seek a one-year exemption if they receive a violation notice.

Presto contends that the wood-burning regulations have been successful. He said several studies have confirmed cutting air pollution improves public health and a recent study found that air pollution laws have saved hundreds of lives.

Progress against pollution

The district has been successful in meeting federal standards for the amount of particulate matter that's smaller than 10 microns (a micron is one millionth of a meter), and so it is now trying to conform to tighter standards for even smaller particulate matter.

That's why district residents weren't able to have as many fires this winter.

"The standard is beginning to become much harder to meet," Presto said.

The district stretches from San Joaquin County to Kern County and is comprised of northern, central and southern regions with district offices in Modesto, Fresno and Bakersfield. It has a budget of \$137 million, which is nearly double that of last year. About \$50 million of that funding increase comes through Proposition 1B, which was passed in 2006 and aims to reduce the amount of emissions from the state's transportation network. The district employs 310 people and spends about \$27 million a year in salaries and benefits, according to district budget information.

More than \$100 million of the district's total budget is allocated to "non-operating appropriations," most of which are incentive programs to reduce air pollution. These include the Proposition 1B funds as well as other programs like the Carl Moyer Heavy Duty Truck Fleet Modernization Program, which had more than \$10.4 million this year to defray the cost for truckers to upgrade old diesel engines to new, cleaner models.

Despite the district's incentives, some industry leaders say it has been more of a burden than a blessing.

"The air quality in this state has improved some, but what have we really done? We've moved every factory with a smokestack to China," said Galt resident and dairyman Case Van Steyn.

Van Steyn, who serves on the board of directors for Dairy Farmers of America and the Sacramento County Farm Bureau, said that added regulations on farmers and businesses in the Central Valley have caused them to close up shop or outsource operations elsewhere.

Air pollution is a touchy subject for dairymen, who have long argued that their cows don't emit the levels of methane and other gases that are to blame for the Valley's poor air quality.

Van Steyn, however, also argues that the costly equipment upgrades, like having to buy a new truck to replace one that doesn't meet emission standards mandated by the air district, prevent companies from investing in the state's economy.

"Everybody is for clean air and clean water. Who's opposed to that?" Van Steyn said. "Everybody would like clean air, but I don't want to go broke over the concept."

San Joaquin County Supervisor Leroy Ornellas is the county's representative on the district's 15-member governing board. Ornellas is a dairyman himself; the Ornellas family has been running its Tracy dairy since the 1930s.

As a member of the district's board, Ornellas says he understands the need for regulations to ensure clean air. But as a farmer, he also can relate to the businessman who feels overwhelmed by all the various laws.

Ornellas said that the hardest part about his post is striking the right balance between protecting air quality and protecting industry.

"You have sympathy for the Valley resident who suffers from asthma and other air quality health

issues, and you sympathize — or I sympathize — with the businesses that have the federal and state and Valley regulations that are just piled and piled and piled on them and make it very hard for them to do business here in the Valley," he said. "You have some people who literally come before you in tears because of the regulations, and then you have some people who come before you who want more and stricter regulations."

That balance, at least for Ornellas, could be harder to achieve in the future.

"I would say from what I see ... the head of EPA who the new president has appointed and the direction I see the fed government going as far as the environment, I have got to believe the answer is yes," he said when asked if he foresees even stricter air regulations. "I'm not advocating it, but I have to say yes."

Air district by the numbers

2008-09 district budget: \$137,037,900

District population: 3,834,766*

Reserves: \$3,500,000

Employees: 310

Sources: 2008-09 San Joaquin Valley Air Control District budget, U.S. Census

How do they determine a 'no-burn' day?

Every day, forecasters with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District analyze local weather patterns. Factors that can influence air quality can include high pressure systems and how the air is circulating at ground level.

If the forecast calls for conditions that could result in a specific level of pollution or "particulate matter" per cubic meter, the district will declare a "no-burn" day.

The San Joaquin Valley can have some of the worst air conditions in the country because of its geography. Air moves in from the coastal regions but hits the Sierra Nevada and becomes trapped in the Valley. During the summer, residents in the Valley endured weeks of hazy, smoky air from hundreds of forest fires. Even after some fires were extinguished, Lodi and numerous other cities had to endure the haze because of the weather.

These weather patterns that hold the Valley air in place are what makes fireplaces so detrimental to air quality. The particulate matter emitted from fireplaces is similar to the haze that hung in the air this past summer.

Questions on air quality

San Joaquin County Supervisor Leroy Ornellas represents the county on the 15-member governing board that oversees the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Ornellas replaced former supervisor Jack Sieglock on the board and is currently starting his third year of service on the board.

Q: What's the biggest contributing factor to poor air quality?

A: We deal with stationary sources (factories, farms and houses), but the biggest factor is mobile; that's cars and trucks that have the biggest impact on air quality. But we deal with stationary and it's the smallest piece of the puzzle, and it puts a great amount of pressure on stationary. The biggest factor is mobile, so if we could get the air clear on that side it would be a great help to us.

Q: Does the San Joaquin Valley get stuck with the Bay Area's air pollution?

A: Not all of it, but a pretty good portion does flow into here. They deny it, but it's true. ... I remember in August when they were having the Napa fires you could see this plume of smoke just heading from Napa into the San Joaquin Valley.

Q: What do you say to people who argue a government agency shouldn't have any business regulating when they can or can not have a fire in their fireplace?

A: That, again, is one of the issues that troubles me. When we're telling people, yes, they can have a fire in the fireplace, or no you can't. ... (when) we as a government entity begin to poke our nose into the private lives of people. ... but I understand how it's helpful on bad air quality days that we can encourage people in San Joaquin County not to burn. It has a positive impact on air quality. It's hard for me, but I understand it.

Air District reviews new rules on local farms

By Alex Cantatore

Turlock Journal, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009

While the aroma that wafts from local farms has long been of concern to the noses of some city folk, the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District is now concerned about the vapors leaving local farms as well. Local dairies, meat, and egg producers may be facing increased costs in these tough economic times, as the District looks to cut nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compound emissions from local confined animal facilities through a set of stringent proposed rules.

"If they ratchet up the regulations that means additional costs and additional compliance issues," said Paul Souza, Western United Dairymen Environmental Specialist.

The District is in the beginning stages of reviewing Draft Rule 4570, which seeks to improve Valley ozone levels by making "expeditiously practicable, technologically feasible, and economically reasonable" regulatory changes to management practices at confined animal facilities. Ozone levels in the Valley currently exceed the eight-hour ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards set by the federal government to protect public health and welfare.

The two leading proposed changes to Rule 4570 are a reduction in the exemption level and the proposed adoption of some South Coast Air Quality Management District confined animal facility management rules.

The exemption change would force smaller farms to comply with the costly emissions regulations. While a farm of 3,500 head of cattle was once the threshold, the new definition might cut that number to 1,000 cattle. For hens, the previous number of 650,000 may drop to 125,000.

"This is not the time to raise costs on any business," said Bill Mattos, President of the California Poultry Federation. "Even though poultry is a popular product in California, it's never a good idea to bring new costs at a time producers don't need them."

The South Coast emissions-reducing management rules would greatly increase the labor needed to maintain a farm, if adopted. Rather than removing wet manure from individual cow freestall beds every 14 days, as the District currently requires, farmers could need to clean wet manure daily.

"I'm only aware of one freestall dairy in South Coast area," Souza said. "There may not have been an impact when they brought this up down there, but here it would be more of an issue."

The South Coast emissions rules also address changes in the removal of caked animal waste

and the adjustment of drinkers in poultry houses, again making what was once a biweekly activity a daily task. Additionally, dairies would be forced to remove spoiled feed from feed lanes every seven days, a task which currently has no specific measure under District rules.

To Mattos, the proposed District regulations seem especially harsh in the light of Dec. 12, 2008, changes to diesel vehicle and machinery emissions standards. That regulation, which was implemented despite opposition from scientists like James Enstrom of the University of California, Los Angeles, has already forced local farms to fork out hefty sums for new equipment in the past months.

"We thought it was a little unreasonable," Mattos said.

The District will conduct three public workshops to present rule amendments and seek comments from the public before changes will be brought before the District's Governing Board for public hearing and adoption. The first public scoping meetings will be held at 10 a.m. on March 10 and 12 in Fresno, with video teleconferences to the Modesto and Bakersfield District offices.

Calif. regulators target tech industry emissions

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Thursday, Feb. 26, 2009

Sacramento (AP) -- California air regulators on Thursday broadened their reach into Silicon Valley, implementing rules intended to cut greenhouse gas emissions from semiconductor plants.

The state Air Resources Board voted unanimously to regulate some of the most potent gases produced by the semiconductor industry, which makes chips for cell phones, computers and cars.

By Jan. 1, 2012, more than a dozen California chip manufacturers must reduce their use of fluorinated gases. Scientists say such emissions trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere at a rate 23,000 times higher than carbon dioxide.

"The chemicals are highly potent greenhouse gases. It's important that we begin the process of phasing them out," board chairwoman Mary Nichols said.

Because California has a robust semiconductor industry, the boards' actions could set a global standard for reducing emissions, Nichols said.

Industry officials said the regulation will cost businesses some \$37 million at a time when the chip industry is grappling with falling global sales. They also argued that fluorinated gases already are being addressed under voluntary global agreements, although those targets are much weaker than the new California limits.

"To the extent California makes it more costly, more cumbersome to operate here, you're not going to attract these facilities in the future," John Greenagel, a spokesman at the San Jose-based Semiconductor Industry Association, said in a phone interview before Thursday's hearing.

The reductions at semiconductor plants would account for less than 1 percent of the target California is trying to reach under the state's 2006 global warming law, which is intended to cut greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020.

But the regulation is projected to cut by more than half California's output of fluorinated gases, which scientists say persist in the atmosphere for thousands of years. The air board estimates that the amount to be cut under the California regulations is roughly equivalent to the carbon dioxide emitted by 40,000 vehicles a year.

Much of the regulation's cost will be borne by 16 plants that air regulators say account for 94 percent of fluorinated gas emissions.

Those plants would spend an average of \$280,000 a year over the next decade to reformulate their operations, install equipment or find alternative chemicals, according to an air board report.

Industry officials say that's a high price for businesses already struggling in a weakening economy.

One of California's largest manufacturing facilities, NEC Electronics America Inc., has been losing several million dollars a month. The regulation would further shrink its bottom line, said Gus Ballis, a manager at the Roseville-based company.

"The financial impact is going to be severe and affect our ability to be competitive in the market," Ballis told the board. "We're potentially on the chopping block — whether they are going to keep us or pull our production back to Japan."

Twelve California semiconductor plants already meet the proposed emission standards, while 57 others that generate very few emissions would simply have to report their pollution.

"I think it's very clear the cost for some is going to be nothing because they already comply, and the cost of compliance for others is going to be very high," Nichols said.

Until now, fluorinated gases have been addressed under voluntary global agreements struck by the industry. Semiconductor manufacturers have pledged to cut emissions to 10 percent below 1995 levels by next year. The target falls well short of California's 56 percent reduction over the next two years.

Regulators said companies such as NEC that plan to retool or expand their operations would be given another two years to comply.

Delay sought on emissions reduction bill

By Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle staff writer
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009

A Republican state senator has introduced legislation to put California's landmark greenhouse gas reduction plan on hold, but the plan seems to have less of a chance than a polar bear on melting ice.

Sen. Bob Dutton, R-Rancho Cucamonga (San Bernardino County), has introduced a bill to halt the California Air Resources Board from developing regulations to implement the plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

He wants the delay until June at the earliest. The bill also would mandate myriad studies on the economic impact of the measure and require that the state unemployment rate be lower than 5.8 percent for three consecutive months before the delay would be lifted.

Dutton said the goal of the plan would not be changed but that it would be met in "the most effective and efficient way possible," and he was backed at a news conference by African American, Latino and Asian American small business leaders.

But getting the bill through the Democratic-controlled Legislature, which has shown strong support for the plan, will be tough. And even if that happens, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will not agree to a delay, said his spokeswoman Lisa Page.

"We need to invest in renewable energy, cleaner fuels and more efficient vehicles as a way to save consumers money and pump money back into the economy," Page said.

EPA says farm dust open to regulation

By Marco Santana - Associated Press Writer
Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009

DES MOINES, Iowa -- Nothing says summer in Iowa like a cloud of dust behind a combine.

But what may be a fact of life for farmers is a cause for concern to federal regulators, who are refusing to exempt growers from new environmental regulations.

It's left some farmers feeling bemused and more than a little frustrated.

"It's such a non-commonsense idea that you can keep dust within a property line when the wind blows," said Sen. Charles Grassley, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee who still farms in northeast Iowa.

Under rules imposed in 2006, rural areas would be kept to the same standards as urban areas for what the Environmental Protection Agency calls "coarse particulate matter" in the air.

The American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Pork Producers Council had petitioned the government to provide an exemption to farmers. They argued that evidence of harm caused by dust in rural areas hasn't been determined.

But the U.S. District Court of Appeals in Washington ruled Tuesday that the EPA had already provided the evidence necessary to determine farm dust "likely is not safe."

Michael Formica, a lawyer for the pork council, said this means farmers now face the daunting task of proving a negative - that the dust is not harmful.

Formica said his and other groups will consider a further appeal.

Farmers said they will be hard-pressed to meet the standards.

In a letter sent Wednesday to the EPA, Grassley wrote that compliance would be impossible because of the dust produced in farmers' day-to-day activities.

Grassley also has noted that because many rural roads are not paved, particulate readings could be affected by wind gusts that constantly change.

"After all, God decides when the wind blows, not Chuck Grassley," he said.

But the EPA said the regulation was overdue.

Every five years, the Clean Air Act requires the agency to review the newest scientific information and recommend changes to its standards.

EPA spokeswoman Cathy Milbourn said the changes are not just a matter of regulating dust. They serve the public's well-being and, regardless of whether someone lives in a rural or urban area, the threshold for unsafe levels of dust in the air must remain consistent nationally.

"It's health-based," she said. "We don't look at a particular industry. The goal is to protect public health."

When counties reach "non-attainment" levels, it becomes a state's responsibility to bring the county back into acceptable levels.

Milbourn said various options exist for states, such as retrofitting buses that run on diesel engines.

But farmers insist the regulation will affect their operations and eventually their bottom lines. And they said unlike fixing a bus, they have few options for limiting dust from their fields and roads.

Roger Zylstra, a director with the Iowa Cornrowers Association, said if left alone, farmers can compete worldwide. But regulation could impede their success.

He said there seems to be a disconnect between farmers and policymakers.

"Many of the people that are making the rules, it feels like they really don't know what (farming) issues are," said Zylstra, a Lynnville resident who has worked on a farm for 35 years.

Zylstra said it's hard not to get frustrated.

"We think we've met the demands that have been put upon us and lo and behold, we have new and even more stringent demands. It seems really unrealistic."

Ex-ski bum has fix for wood-stove pollution

Julian Guthrie, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009

Dennis Grahn was taking time off from graduate school to be a ski bum when he became intrigued with the idea of reducing pollutants from wood-burning stoves.

Off the mountain, Grahn was making money building wood-burning stoves, and he was vexed by what he saw: The more efficiently a stove burned wood, the more noxious the emissions. Thirty years later, Grahn, a biology professor and senior research scientist at Stanford University, has invented an afterburner for wood-burning stoves that eliminates particulates known to deposit in one's lungs and damage the environment.

"I've spent all of these decades thinking about how to get heat from wood burning without the noxious emissions," says Grahn. "After I came to Stanford for my Ph.D., I had this point of lucidity. I woke up in the middle of the night saying, 'I got it. I got it.' That's when I envisioned this whole afterburner."

The afterburner, a rectangular box of metal and insulation that attaches to a wood-burning stove, works by confining and heating the exhaust gases for a brief period. This enables the hydrocarbons contained in the exhaust stream to combust and form carbon dioxide and water before release through the flue.

The afterburner is in the development phase, but Grahn is optimistic it is finally headed to market. He designed it to be affordable and says the timing is right for it.

"I think our economy is really going to move this forward," Grahn said. "There is going to be an increased demand for wood burning, which means there is going to be increased pressure to develop things that eliminate noxious emissions."

Lynn Hildemann, an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at Stanford and senior fellow at the Woods Institute for the Environment, says there's nothing currently on the market like Grahn's invention.

"As a side project, I did tests on Dennis' afterburner and found that it destroyed greater than 99 percent of the fine particles," she said. "That's a big deal for wood-smoke emissions."

Wood burning is a major global source of noxious emissions, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, and "even limited exposure to smoke can be harmful to one's health."

While newer wood-burning stoves - notably those certified by the EPA - burn fewer particulates per hour, noxious emissions are still released. The EPA estimates that in some parts of the United States during winter months, wood smoke can account for about 80 percent of the air pollution in a residential area.

Kurt Kautz, the owner of Hot Wood Inc. in Lodi (San Joaquin County), the largest processor and distributor of packaged firewood in the West, is working with Grahn to see that the afterburner reaches consumers.

"It's one of those things where there is a great need and this is the perfect fit," Kautz said of the afterburner, which he has tested. "It would be fantastic to see it become commercially available. It would solve a lot of problems. Wood is a renewable resource, and it would be great to see more people use wood for heat if emissions could be controlled."

Kautz said he plans to work on getting seals of approval for the afterburner issued by regional and state environmental agencies. After that, it's a matter of getting the product to a factory.

"There have been afterburners on the market for some time, but not like this," he said, noting that catalytic afterburners are now attached to retail and wholesale coffee roasters to eliminate the smell and the smoke produced in the roasting process. "This is by far the most economical and efficient model I've seen."

Grahn, whose academic career has been focused on the study of temperature regulation in mammals, said his "a-ha" moment came through his understanding of the physiology of arctic mammals.

"Arctic mammals are a model for what we're trying to achieve with the afterburner," Grahn said, singling out the efficiency of the polar bear. "They are local hot spots in a very cold environment. The conceptual way to think about it is that you can create a hot spot in a cold environment without burning a lot of energy. So then I had to take it from an animal model and turn it into a mechanical model."

Working with his brother-in-law, a metal craftsman in Emeryville, Grahn came up with various iterations that will continue to be streamlined.

"Fireplaces are so grossly inefficient," Grahn said. "And people who use wood-burning stoves do so for heat, not because it's cute. People who can't afford the luxury of regulated heat sources use wood-burning stoves and are the ones being exposed to the noxious emissions."

He would love to see his afterburner reach foreign countries, particularly China and Scandinavia, where pollution from burning is pervasive.

"But basically," he said, "anyplace where there is a forest and a human, there is the burning of wood."

Cleaner burning

The Environmental Protection Agency's Web site includes detailed information on cleaner models of wood-burning stoves and fireplaces and tips on using such stoves correctly and safely. The agency also provides state-by-state information on regulations around wood burning and programs to promote healthier burning.

For information, go to www.epa.gov/woodstoves.

Fuel saved, noise reduced with some LAX arrivals

By Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, Feb. 28, 2009

Los Angeles, CA (AP) -- Nearly half of the planes landing at Los Angeles International Airport save fuel and reduce noise and air pollution because of an arrival technique that allows the aircraft to glide rather than make a string of descents.

The procedure, known as continuous descent approaches, is employed by 300 to 400 of the estimated 800 aircraft that land daily at the airport, the Federal Aviation Administration said.

The method allows airplanes to use minimum power instead of having pilots rely on their engines to repeatedly speed up and then slow down to level off.

"It's like taking your foot off the gas at the top of a hill and just gliding straight into the airport from 18,000 feet on a smooth, controlled path to touchdown," said Walter White, an FAA manager who headed a team that developed the procedure.

Officials said the technique also increases the safety of landings, one of the most critical phases of a flight.

They estimate the procedure at LAX saves airlines at least 1 million gallons of fuel annually and reduces carbon dioxide emissions, which have been linked to global warming, by about 18 million pounds a year.

"For everyone in the L.A. basin, this is a help, a total win-win. You've got the fuel savings, the noise reductions and the attendant reduction in contamination," said Denny Schneider, an airport activist and member of the Alliance for a Regional Solution to Airport Congestion.

Federal aviation officials implemented continuous descents at LAX in December 2007 on one of the eastern approaches. The agency has converted the other two eastern routes to the procedure, making LAX the only airport in the nation to have such a broad application of the technique.

Suburban job growth imperils emission goals

James Temple, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, March 1, 2009

San Francisco lagged the region's suburbs in job growth over the last three decades, forcing increasing numbers of commuters to pack highways instead of public transportation even as the dangers of greenhouse gas emissions become increasingly evident, according to a report set for release today.

The city, and other urban areas better served by mass transit than suburban business parks, must adjust policies to attract a greater share of office development and employers, concludes "Recentering Work: The Future of Transit-Oriented Jobs in Downtown San Francisco," released by the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association.

In particular, the study by the planning think tank says the city must revisit current zoning rules, under which the downtown office market could only expand by about 16 percent, or 13 million

square feet. Based on various projections, that means the city's core could be completely built out in as little as seven years - and at most 15.

"When we look at the last 30 years of Bay Area history, it's been a history of increasing commutes by cars, employment spread out and decentralized over a wider and wider area, and a decline of our central cities as a share of all jobs," said Egon Terplan, SPUR policy director and the report's principal author. "We cannot meet regional climate change goals unless we change that pattern."

The report is careful to offer a range of suggestions for accomplishing this, and Terplan said the goal of the report is to begin debate on this issue. But some of the proposals are certain to spark controversy, as they directly conflict with recently adopted neighborhood plans and long-standing attitudes toward development in the city.

Easing restrictions

Most notably, the study suggested easing density and height restrictions in the core downtown area, loosening the city's annual cap on office construction and allowing more commercial buildings in the Transbay Terminal and Rincon Hill areas.

"SPUR is way wrong," said Calvin Welch, a longtime San Francisco affordable housing activist, who said developers haven't used the full office allocation allowed under Proposition M for years and, based on current economic conditions, probably won't anytime soon. "The workforce that fits in Class A office space is precisely the sector of the economy that has been shredded by the current recession." He alleged the study reflects the financial interests of SPUR's architecture and developer members, rather than good public policy.

Whether or not SPUR's solutions are the right ones, it is clear that the region's current building patterns are working against the goals laid out in AB32, the landmark global warming legislation that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law in 2006. It seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in California by 30 percent by 2020.

The nine-county Bay Area doubled its employment since 1970, but San Francisco only accounted for around 4 percent of the growth, according to the SPUR study. In contrast, Santa Clara, Alameda and Contra Costa counties captured 37 percent, 20 percent and 15 percent of the new jobs, respectively.

That means more workers commute by automobile to suburban offices. Vehicle miles traveled surged in outlying counties, by as much as 65 percent in Contra Costa during the past 20 years, while the figure remained relatively flat in San Francisco. It's the only job center in the region where roughly 50 percent of workers get to work through public transportation, thanks to its concentration of offices around train stations and bus stops.

Transportation accounts for one-third of all CO₂ emissions in California.

"The Bay Area certainly faces a challenge in reducing vehicle miles traveled, related to a significant portion of our employment that is located in office parks," said Ken Kirkey, planning director with the Association of Bay Area Governments.

Push and pull

SPUR points to a number of reasons for this trend, including "pull" factors like the lower cost of wages, rents and taxes in suburban areas and "push" factors like crime, negative attitudes toward job growth and building caps in cities. It argues that some of these pulls are turning into pushes

and vice versa, as commutes grow longer, gas prices climb and the talent pool becomes more concentrated in urban areas.

Those shifts, coupled with a growing realization of the environmental importance of concentrating employment growth in cities, will boost demand for San Francisco office space over the long term, Terplan said, making it critical to reconsider the city's land use restrictions.

To attract and accommodate jobs, the region also must improve public transportation options and capacity, the report said. With 10,000 peak-hour riders per day, BART's Embarcadero Station is already essentially at capacity.

SPUR recommended implementing a series of changes, including adding more BART capacity, expanding bus services over the bridges, better coordinating different regional transit services, building new transit lines, expanding ferry capacity, and encouraging bicycling and walking.

Obama raises hopes of world climate accord

Elisabeth Rosenthal, New York Times

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Sunday, March 1, 2009

Until recently, the idea that the world's most powerful nations might come together to tackle global warming seemed an environmentalist's pipe dream.

The Kyoto Protocol, signed in 1997, was widely viewed as badly flawed. Many countries that signed the accord lagged far behind their targets in curbing carbon dioxide emissions. The United States refused even to ratify it. And the treaty gave a pass to major emitters in the developing world like China and India.

But within weeks of taking office, President Obama has radically shifted the global equation, placing the United States at the forefront of the international climate effort and raising hopes that an effective international accord might be possible. Obama's chief climate negotiator, Todd Stern, said last week that the United States would be involved in the negotiation of a new treaty - to be signed in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December - "in a robust way."

That treaty, officials and climate experts involved in the negotiations say, will significantly differ from the agreement of a decade ago, reaching beyond reducing greenhouse gas emissions and including financial mechanisms and making good on long-standing promises to provide money and technical assistance to help developing countries cope with climate change.

The perception that the United States is now serious has set off a flurry of diplomacy around the globe. "The lesson of Kyoto is that if the United States isn't taking it seriously, there is no reason for anyone else to," said Bill McKibben, who runs the environmental organization 350.org.

This week the United Nations' top climate official, Yvo de Boer, will make the rounds in Washington to discuss climate issues. The U.N. secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon, is organizing a high-level meeting on climate and energy. Teams from Britain and Denmark have visited the White House to discuss climate issues. In China, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton made climate a central focus of her visit and proposed a partnership between the United States and China. And a special envoy from China is coming soon.

But a global treaty still faces serious challenges in Washington and abroad, and the negotiations will be a test of how far the United States and other nations are prepared to go to address climate change at a moment when economies around the world are unspooling. The global recession

itself is expected to result in a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, as manufacturing and other polluting industries shrink, lessening the pressure on countries to take action.

"The No. 1 thing will be for everyone to see that the U.S. is on an urgent and transformational path to a low-carbon economy - that would have a galvanizing effect," said John Ashton, the British foreign secretary's special representative for climate change.

The Obama administration has said that it will push through federal legislation this year to curb carbon dioxide emissions in the United States - a promise that Obama reiterated Tuesday in his speech to Congress.

The Kyoto Protocol has been a touchstone of the environmental movement. Thirty-seven developed countries, including Japan, Australia and nations in the European Union, ratified the accord, agreeing to reduce or limit the growth of carbon dioxide emissions by specified amounts. President George W. Bush, pressed by the Senate, rejected the accord, because countries like China were not also subject to mandatory emission levels. China and India also refused to ratify the protocol.

At the end of his administration, Bush made tentative overtures toward China and other countries on climate matters. In 2007, he convened a meeting of countries that were major emitters of greenhouse gases.

Later, in bilateral economic talks, China and the United States agreed that they would cooperate on clean technology development and some other climate issues.

But Kyoto was shaped largely by climate scientists and environment ministers, not the higher-level officials now laying the groundwork. And even many who participated in the earlier accord now say they see it as weak and naive about political and economic realities. Of the countries that signed, more than half are not on track to meet their targets according to 2008 U.N. data, including Germany, Ireland and Canada.

"In Kyoto we made a lot of promises to each other, but we hadn't done the domestic politics," Ashton said, "and that is why Kyoto - though a valuable step forward - has ultimately been so fragile."

The talks on the new treaty, said Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "provides an opportunity to fill this gap that we've seen, and this time perform up to expectations."

The 1997 protocol was a narrow accord about the emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases linked to global warming. The new agreement will need to address how those reductions can be achieved in a way that takes account of their effects on energy supplies and economies.

Capitol Power Plant Dims Clean Energy Hopes

By the Associated Press

In the N.Y. Times, Sunday, March 1, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- As Congress tries to clean up the nation's energy sources and cut gases blamed for global warming, it is struggling to do so in its own backyard.

The Capitol Power Plant, a 99-year-old facility that heats and cools the hallowed halls of Congress, still burns coal and accounts for one-third of the legislative branch's greenhouse gas emissions. For a decade, lawmakers have attempted to clean it up.

In recent years, Congress has reduced its energy consumption. The steam and chilled-water power plant has become more efficient. It now burns more natural gas, and only 35 percent coal, compared with 49 percent in 2007.

But Congress is running out of options to make the plant fully green. On Friday the House announced that it was abandoning its goal to be carbon neutral and would no longer buy offsets to make sure it was removing as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as it releases. Those offsets were key to zeroing out the remaining emissions at the power plant that could not be reduced by other means.

There are also questions about whether Congress can afford to pay for more natural gas, which burns cleaner than coal.

The plant's story is one that is likely to play out across the United States as Congress looks to limit greenhouse gases and require more of the country's energy to come from wind, solar and other renewable sources.

The issues hampering the cleanup -- politics, cost and technological barriers -- could trip up similar efforts elsewhere. The U.S. counts on coal-fired power plants for about half of its electricity; the plants are also the biggest source of heat-trapping gases.

So if Congress cannot act locally, as the environmental slogan goes, how can it begin to think globally?

In 2007, the facility released 118,851 tons of carbon dioxide, according to the Energy Department. That's a fraction of the amount released by the roughly 600 coal-fired power plants nationwide that produce electricity, and the emissions created at other plants from which Congress buys power.

"We are holding it up as a symbol for how we can and must do better," said Mike Tidwell, director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network. It is among 40 environmental organizations planning a protest Monday that is expected to draw about 2,500 people to the plant a few blocks south of the Capitol.

Among them will be James Hansen, the NASA scientist who first testified in 1988 about the perils of global warming. He has called for halting construction of new coal-fired power plants without technology to capture and store carbon dioxide, the most prevalent greenhouse gas.

"They need to start by getting the coal out of Congress," Hansen said.

While carbon dioxide from the facility could be reduced 60 percent using carbon sequestration technology, the Energy Department in April 2008 ruled that out. The \$112 million cost was too high. There is no place nearby to dispose of the gas and the extra coal burned to run the carbon-trapping equipment would increase other types of air pollution.

Offsetting the power plant's emissions by investing in projects that reduce carbon elsewhere also doesn't look like a viable option. The House spent \$89,000 in 2007 and 2008 in part to cancel out the remaining portion of its carbon dioxide emissions at the plant. But on Friday the House said it would no longer purchase offsets because there is no way to verify whether the investment actually results in carbon neutrality.

Recognizing these dead ends, just last week House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., wrote the Architect of the Capitol, which oversees the

maintenance and operation of the Capitol Complex, including the Capitol Power Plant, with another recycled idea: convert the plant entirely to natural gas.

While four times more expensive than coal, natural gas produces about half as much carbon dioxide.

Referring to the facility as a shadow hanging over efforts to make Congress more environmentally friendly, the leaders said the conversion would demonstrate Congress' willingness to deal with global warming, energy independence and the use of finite fossil fuels.

An effort in 2000 to rid the plant of coal and oil was blocked by two senators from coal-producing states. Sens. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., and Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., argued at the time that the continued use of coal would save taxpayers money because it is cheaper than natural gas.

Last week Byrd seemed more willing to compromise, saying he would support looking at the natural gas option.

Converting the plant entirely to natural gas would require equipment upgrades at the facility that would cost between \$6 million and \$7 million, in addition to having to buy more natural gas. It would cost \$139 per ton of carbon dioxide saved, or about \$2 million a year just for the House's portion of heating and air conditioning.

Pelosi and Reid say the investment far outweighs the costs. But in the midst of an economic crisis, it is not clear if that would be money well spent.

"It doesn't make any difference what they do," said Bill Kovacs, vice president for the environment, technology & regulatory affairs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "It makes a statement, but it is not going to change carbon dioxide concentrations at all anywhere in the world and coal will continue to be used somewhere else."

Coal-fired power plants elsewhere will have difficulty meeting new mandates if passed by lawmakers.

"The oldest and dirtiest ones will not compete well under that system," said Tidwell, who supports efforts to get the Capitol Power Plant off coal. "The people who own those power plants will have to make some choices."

Protest puts spotlight on Congress' power plant

By Dina Cappiello, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Sunday, March 1, 2009

WASHINGTON — They are calling it one of the biggest U.S. protests on climate change - hundreds of activists gathered around a tiny power plant in Southeast Washington that heats and cools the Capitol.

While small in size, the 99-year-old facility is a symbol of the challenges ahead for Congress on energy and the climate.

That's because as lawmakers gear up to pass legislation to reduce the gases blamed for global warming and clean up the nation's energy sources, they have yet to succeed in their own backyard.

"We are holding it up as a symbol for how we can and must do better," said Mike Tidwell, director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network, one of 40 environmental groups organizing the

protest to call on Congress to pass a bill to curb greenhouse gases. Among those expected to attend are NASA scientist James Hansen, who first testified before Congress about the perils of global warming in 1988.

Hansen has called for a halt on building any new coal-fired power plants without technology to capture and store carbon dioxide, the most prevalent greenhouse gas and the chief one at the Capitol Power Plant.

In 2007, the facility released 118,851 tons of carbon dioxide, according to the Energy Department - a fraction of what the nation's 600 coal-fired power plants produce.

But despite repeated attempts by Congress to clean it up - including provisions in two 2007 laws - the plant still burns coal and accounts for a third of the legislative branch's greenhouse gas emissions.

Efforts to make the plant run more efficiently, reduce energy consumption and use more cleaner-burning natural gas have succeeded in recent years.

But Congress is running out of options to make it fully green. On Friday the House announced that it was abandoning its goal to be carbon neutral and would no longer buy offsets to make sure it was removing as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as it releases. Those offsets were key to zeroing out emissions at the plant that could not be reduced by other means.

There are also questions as to whether Congress can afford to pay for more natural gas.

The story of the Capitol Power Plant is one likely to play out across the country as Congress looks to limit greenhouse gases and require more energy to come from wind, solar and other renewable sources.

The problems that have hampered its cleanup - politics, cost and technological barriers - could trip up similar efforts around the country. Coal-fired power plants are the biggest sources of heat-trapping gases.

It also raises the question: If Congress can't act locally, as the slogan goes, how can it begin to think globally?

"They need to start by getting the coal out of Congress," Hansen said.

While the use of carbon sequestration technology could reduce carbon dioxide at the facility by about 60 percent, the Energy Department determined in an April 2008 study that the facility was not a good candidate.

It cited the \$112 million cost, the lack of a place to dispose of the gas, and the increased emissions of other air pollutants that would result from the plant having to burn more coal to run the carbon-trapping equipment.

Offsetting the power plant's emissions by investing in projects that reduce carbon elsewhere also doesn't look like a viable option. The House spent \$89,000 in 2007 and 2008 in part to cancel out the remaining portion of its carbon dioxide emissions at the plant. But on Friday the House said it would no longer purchase offsets because there is no way to verify whether the investment actually results in carbon neutrality.

Recognizing these dead ends, last week House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid wrote to the Architect of the Capitol, which oversees the maintenance and operation of the Capitol Complex, with another recycled idea: convert the plant entirely to natural gas.

While four times more expensive than coal, natural gas produces about half as much carbon dioxide.

An earlier effort to rid the plant of coal and oil in 2000 was blocked by two senators from coal-producing states. Democratic Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia and Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky argued that continued use of coal would save taxpayers money because it is cheaper than natural gas.

Last week Byrd seemed more willing to compromise, saying he would support having the plant's operators look at ways to increase natural gas use.

Switching from coal to natural gas would cost \$139 per ton of carbon dioxide saved, or about \$2 million a year - and that's just for the House's portion of heating and air conditioning. Converting the plant entirely to natural gas would require \$6 million to \$7 million in equipment upgrades, in addition to buying more natural gas.

Pelosi and Reid say the investment outweighs the costs. But in the midst of an economic crisis, it is not clear if that would be money well spent.

Tenn. offer to offset carbon tax credited in deals

By Erik Schelzig - AP Business Writer
Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, March 1, 2009

CLEVELAND, Tenn. -- Tennessee's unusual commitment to cover the cost of any future carbon tax for green companies that make major investments is being credited for luring two big solar energy developments worth more than \$2 billion.

The tax break, which Democratic Gov. Phil Bredesen shepherded through the state legislature with little fanfare last year, promises that Tennessee will offset increased costs from any future tax on carbon emissions for a select group of companies that make significant investments.

The credit would apply to any green energy supply chain company spending at least \$250 million in the state. That includes the \$1 billion Wacker Chemie AG plant announced in Bradley County last week, and the \$1.2 billion Hemlock Semiconductor Corp. plant to be built in Montgomery County.

Both plants will make polysilicon, a material used to make solar cells.

Not all new investments in the state will benefit, though. Traditional industrial investments, like the \$1 billion Volkswagen AG plant under construction in Chattanooga, don't qualify.

State Revenue Commissioner Reagan Farr said the credit was enacted to help eliminate uncertainty among investors.

"They were worried that Congress or the state would enact a carbon tax that would have to be borne by the company," he said. "So what we did was create a green energy tax credit, which actually says the state will take that out of the equation."

President Barack Obama's budget presented to Congress this week moves to address climate change and shift the nation from reliance on foreign oil to green energy. The proposal would begin auctioning off carbon pollution permits in 2012, but Congress has yet to write a bill that would regulate heat-trapping gases and define how the money would be collected.

The Tennessee Valley Authority produces about 60 percent of its power from coal, so investors in the state worry that increased costs from a cap-and-trade system could be passed on to them.

Monique Hanis, spokeswoman for the Solar Energy Industries Association in Washington, said Tennessee is taking a unique approach to the carbon tax question.

"It's definitely a new twist, and an interesting hedge for states that are trying to attract manufacturing," she said.

Rudolph Staudigl, president and CEO of Munich, Germany-based Wacker, said the credit showed that officials are serious about developing the green energy sector in Tennessee.

"It's just another demonstration of the fact that the state of Tennessee is really trying to attract the right businesses," Staudigl said.

Making polysilicon is an energy-intensive process, but solar panels soon offset the carbon emitted to create them, said Steve Smith, director of the Knoxville-based Southern Alliance for Clean Energy.

"This is a very innovative and thoughtful way to lure and set a green foundation for the state of Tennessee" he said of the tax credit. "We certainly applaud that and think it's appropriate."

Farr said he and Economic and Community Development Commissioner Matt Kisber came up with the tax credit after being charged by the governor with developing a strategy to spur alternative energy projects in the state.

"He did not want us to pursue the strategy that a lot of other states have been pursuing, like sales tax holidays for fluorescent light bulbs to encourage consumption," Farr said. "He looked at it as an economic development opportunity, and he told us to look for anchors in the clean energy field."

[Fresno Bee commentaries, Sunday, March 1, 2009:](#)

TWO VIEWS: New EPA chief's toughness, tact will strike fear in polluters

By Wayne Madsen

WASHINGTON -- President Obama's selection of Carol Browner as the assistant to the president for energy and climate change bodes well for correcting the devastating environmental policies of the last eight years.

Browner served two terms as President Clinton's administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, the longest term that any EPA chief has served since the agency's creation by President Richard Nixon in 1970.

A longtime environmental activist, going back to the days when she worked for Ralph Nader's Citizen Action public advocacy group, Browner can be expected to be tough on polluters as she was as head of the EPA.

Moreover, Browner -- now dubbed the "climate change czarina" -- is a disciple of and former aide to then-Sen. Al Gore, now a Nobel Peace Prize laureate for his tireless work to alert the world to the perils of global warming.

With her strong environmental advocacy background, Browner can be expected to be as tough as one can expect from a senior White House adviser.

She will team with the new EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson to formulate sensible policies that reverse the Bush administration's eight years of environmental foot-dragging. Jackson earned national plaudits as commissioner of New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection.

Browner comes to her new post with a "tough as nails" attitude that will grab the attention of wayward industries that have profited from an absence of strong environmental regulation for most of this decade.

Undoubtedly, Browner will enjoy more collegiality in the area of international diplomacy because she knows and agrees with most of the leaders of Europe's Green Movement. With that

background, she's exactly the right person to gain wide support for U.S. initiatives at the U.N. environmental summit in Copenhagen next December.

She knows full well that heavy-handedness and arrogance with newly emergent industrial nations like China and India will not further the aims of those who want to see real improvement on the global climate change front.

As the top coordinator between various federal agencies on global climate change issues, Browner will be in a position to succeed in her goal of doubling renewable solar, wind, tidal and geothermal energy output.

It's cause for celebration among avid environmentalists that neither nuclear energy nor the oxymoron of "clean coal" are in her environmental lexicon.

The new energy and environmental czarina also is in position to ensure that economic stimulus funds reach those firms in the growing "green collar" industry that can hire and train a new work force earning sustainable salaries -- a move that will reduce unemployment in every area of the nation. Browner has made no secret about the fact that she intends to use her new bully pulpit to do everything possible to jump-start America's lagging green technological base.

Browner also can use her White House muscle to ensure that the Democratic Senate ratifies the United Nations' Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions prior to the U.N. summit in Copenhagen. She knows that the United States cannot go into the summit in Denmark as a scofflaw from Kyoto.

A combination of toughness and tact should ensure that Browner's role as climate change czarina will grab the attention of domestic greenhouse gas-emitting industries while assuaging the concerns of major international greenhouse gas producing nations like China and India and calming the fears of nations like Tuvalu, Kiribati and Bangladesh that are the victims of sea-level rises from the melting of polar icecaps.

When it comes to the environment and global climate change, America has been asleep at the switch for the last eight years. Carol Browner is the perfect person to command rave reviews from the rest of the world by ringing the alarm bell that wakes America from its arrogant slumber.
Wayne Madsen is a contributing writer to the Progressive Online Journal.

TWO VIEWS: A scientist, not a zealot, should direct policy

By David A. Ridenour

WASHINGTON -- President Obama vowed to set a new direction of ethics and transparency in government and with his selection of Carol Browner as climate control czar, he has -- the wrong direction.

An environmental zealot, Browner has so much baggage she could be an airline.

But then, maybe not! For despite Browner's best efforts, some of her baggage simply won't stay lost.

The Washington Examiner recently discovered that she was one of 15 original members of the Commission for a Sustainable World Society, a branch of the Socialist International, an organization linking socialist and labor parties throughout the world. Among other things, its Declaration of Principles "demands compensation for ... social inequities."

That's another way of saying that if you've prospered because of ingenuity or hard work, be prepared to give a lot of it away to those who haven't.

The issue isn't that Browner is a socialist. We crossed the socialism bridge -- a real bridge to nowhere -- when we sent a man to the White House who promised to spread our wealth around.

The real issue is the attempt to hide this fact from the public. Browner's photograph, which once appeared alongside that of close Vladimir Putin ally Sergei Mironov, was quietly removed from the Socialist International's Web site after the Examiner's story broke.

Much like the trillions of dollars in bailouts and economic stimulus, it's as though Browner never existed.

This isn't transparent government, but all too transparent politics. Browner has a lot more baggage, too.

Throughout her years as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency in the Clinton administration, EPA officials routinely violated the Anti-Lobbying Act, a law prohibiting federal employees from using agency money for "... telephone, letter, printed or written matter, or other device intended or designed to influence in any manner a Member of Congress." In 1995, the EPA flagrantly violated that law when it lobbied against the Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act, a bill that would have curbed some of the EPA's worst abuses.

As James F. Hinchman, comptroller general of the United States, noted, EPA officials "distributed EPA fact sheets to various organizations ... directly lobbied the Congress." Not only that, but an EPA regional administrator wrote a strong op-ed designed to stop the bill's passage.

Four years later, Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., accused the EPA of violating the Anti-Lobbying Act again. Byrd complained that the EPA's Transportation Partners Program was coordinating and funding anti-road lobbyists against the law and his state's interests. Browner was forced to terminate the program.

The following year Browner was at it yet again. This time, her agency was accused of allowing special interests to improperly influence last-minute -- so-called "midnight" -- environmental regulations. U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth ordered the EPA to preserve communications with such groups. Instead, Browner had her computer hard drive re-initialized, wiping it clean. Lamberth subsequently held the EPA in contempt for "contumacious conduct."

As little respect as she's shown for the law, she's shown even less for science. During her years at the EPA, agency scientists who didn't tow the party line were subjected to relentless harassment.

David Lewis, an EPA Science Achievement Award recipient, publicly criticized the quality of science used in crafting regulations. In response, the EPA charged Lewis with ethics violations and repeatedly denied him promotion. Although he won whistle-blower judgments against the EPA, he was eventually forced into retirement.

The term "czar" comes from the Latin word caesar -- as in Julius Caesar, the Roman leader who proclaimed himself dictator perpetuo (dictator in perpetuity) and oversaw massive expansion of government bureaucracy.

If a czar actually is what President Obama was looking for, Carol Browner might have been the perfect choice, after all.

David Ridenour is vice president of the National Center for Public Policy Research, a conservative think tank.

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, March 1, 2009:](#)

'Action is needed now'

For the past 40 years, as our climate has warmed, birds have shifted their winter ranges farther and farther north. This ecological disruption is yet another wake-up call that we must act quickly to solve the climate crisis. The birds' northward movement is another signal that climate change is here and action is needed now.

We need global warming legislation that will help birds and wildlife survive what is coming by protecting their habitats and will reduce global warming pollution 80% by 2050 to avoid the worst impacts of a rapidly changing climate. We also need to repower America by moving us toward a 100% clean energy future, reduce our dependence on oil by half and invest in the clean energy economy of tomorrow.

The time to act is now, before it is too late. The cost of inaction will be high in both dollars and a diminished world. It would be a shame if we leave our children and grandchildren with fewer birds to grace our skies and less wildlife to enjoy.

Howard Clark, Clovis

Need more dams

Thinking about global warming, melting of the polar ice, oceans filling up. Maybe this is too simple, but we could build dams to capture the water, which we could use in farming, drinking and everyday use. Not to mention that it would not flow into the oceans giving them room for the melting ice. It could work, maybe.

Leroy Griffin, Clovis

[Letters to the Fresno Bee, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009:](#)

Indisputable

Re changes in bird population [editorial Feb. 24]: Woolly mammoths have moved farther north than ever before. Their normal stamping grounds hundreds of days walk to the south have made local clans in that warm region go hungry.

Astor predictors, in the local Pleistocene Gazette, have stated that this is a clear change in the far north's climate pattern. You know this is true because it was chiseled in stone.

Bob Novak, Coarsegold

'On the fast track'

We Californians had the vision. Last November, we voted to pass the High-Speed Rail Bond Act. Now, President Obama's economic stimulus package includes \$8 billion for the nation's high-speed rail systems.

It's been a long and slow ride since California's high-speed rail system was first proposed. At last, it is now on the fast track. The system will not just relieve traffic congestions and reduce air pollution, but also stimulate economic development and cut greenhouse gas emission.

Hopefully, all we need to do now is to sit back, relax and enjoy a smooth ride ahead.

John Suen, Fresno

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Obama and climate change; the promise to fight against global warming. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Obama y el cambio climático

Prometió luchar contra el calentamiento

AFP

Univision.com, Monday, March 02, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC - Estados Unidos "luchará contra el espectro del calentamiento" global y "devolverá a la ciencia su lugar correcto", dijo el presidente Barack Obama, prometiendo poner fin a las políticas que relegaron a un segundo plano la ciencia y la ecología.

El lugar de la ciencia

"Con viejos amigos y ex adversarios, trabajaremos incansablemente para reducir la amenaza nuclear y hacer retroceder el espectro del calentamiento del planeta", dijo Obama en su discurso inaugural, prometiendo que promoverá una revolución verde en materia de energías renovables.

La declaración de Obama marca un giro absoluto con respecto a la postura de su predecesor, George W. Bush, cuya negativa a firmar en 2001 el Protocolo de Kioto destruyó los esfuerzos multilaterales para combatir el calentamiento global.

Fue sólo después de una lluvia de críticas que el equipo de Bush firmó la "Hoja de ruta de Bali", en diciembre, durante un encuentro sobre cambio climático auspiciado por la ONU que estableció un plazo de un año para llegar a un acuerdo global en la materia, en una próxima reunión en Copenhague.

"Restauraremos la ciencia en su debido lugar, y usaremos las maravillas de la tecnología para incrementar la calidad de nuestro sistema de salud y reducir su costo", dijo Obama.\

Política energética

"Usaremos el sol y los vientos y la tierra para alimentar nuestros vehículos y hacer funcionar nuestras fábricas. Y transformaremos nuestras escuelas y colegios y universidades para enfrentar los desafíos de la nueva era. Podemos hacer todo eso y haremos todo eso", continuó.

Obama ha llamado a hacer esfuerzos para revisar la política energética de su país, que incluye la creación de cinco millones de nuevos trabajos "verdes", un 80 por ciento de reducción de emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero para 2050 y la garantía de que 10 por ciento de la energía que se consume en Estados Unidos provenga de fuentes renovables para 2012 y 25 por ciento para 2025.

Los ambientalistas esperan que Obama combata la herencia de Bush y sitúe a Estados Unidos en un lugar protagónico en la lucha contra el cambio climático.

Pero los analistas advierten contra los triunfalismos. El margen de maniobra de Obama podría ser limitado, cuando tiene por un lado la recesión estadounidense y, por el otro, diciembre de 2009 como fecha límite para completar el nuevo tratado sobre medioambiente de la ONU.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses for the first time, pollution from technology industry is regulated.

Regulan por primera vez contaminación de industria de alta tecnología

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino, San Diego, Monday, March 2, 2009

La Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California decidió por unanimidad reglamentar por primera vez las emisiones de contaminación que genera la industria de la alta tecnología. Las empresas de computación, *microchips* y teléfonos celulares, entre otras tendrán que instalar equipos reguladores de contaminación del aire antes de l primero de enero del 2012. El número de empresas de alta tecnología en California es menor a las cien compañías, y se ubican principalmente en el valle del Silicón, al sur de San Francisco. Sin embargo, un estudio en el que la Oficina estatal basó su decisión dice que esa industria genera gases 'flouronados', que son entre seis mil 500 y 23 mil veces más peligrosos que el dióxido de carbono en cuanto a cambio climático.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Persident Obama's defense of the budget for change. His is ready to go against special interest groups in order to expand health care, stop pollution and better education.](#)

Obama defiende el “presupuesto del cambio”

El presidente Barack Obama describió ayer su plan presupuestal como “una amenaza al statu quo en Washington” y se definió como alguien que “trabaja por el pueblo estadounidense” y que está dispuesto a luchar contra los intereses especiales con tal de expandir la atención médica, frenar la contaminación y mejorar la educación

Peter Baker The New York Times
El Universal, Sunday, March 1, 2009

WASHINGTON.— El presidente Barack Obama describió ayer su plan presupuestal como “una amenaza al statu quo en Washington” y se definió como alguien que “trabaja por el pueblo estadounidense” y que está dispuesto a luchar contra los intereses especiales con tal de expandir la atención médica, frenar la contaminación y mejorar la educación.

“No vine aquí para hacer lo mismo que hemos estado haciendo o para dar pequeños pasos hacia adelante”, dijo Obama en su discurso semanal de radio, que también se transmitió vía Internet. “Vine para traer el profundo cambio que este país exigió cuando acudió a las urnas, en noviembre”.

Sus palabras fueron un indicio de la estrategia que la Casa Blanca pretende emplear para presionar a favor del plan de gasto difundido la semana pasada: posicionar, como en el pasado, al Partido Demócrata como el que lucha contra los ricos y poderosos. En palabras de Obama, está luchando contra los intereses de los bancos, las compañías de seguros, la agroindustria, las empresas petroleras y de gas, entre otras.

“Sé que estas medidas no les caerán bien a los intereses especiales y cabilderos que están acostumbrados a la manera tradicional de hacer negocios, y sé que se preparan para la lucha”, insistió Obama. “Mi mensaje para ellos es éste: Yo también”.

Además del presupuesto por 3.6 billones de dólares para el año fiscal 2010, el plan de gasto del presidente incluye iniciativas ambiciosas para los próximos años que, en conjunto, transformarían a la sociedad estadounidense. Quiere extender la cobertura médica a más de 40 millones de estadounidenses que no están asegurados; modernizar la industria para que deje de producir tantas emisiones de gases causantes del cambio climático; desarrollar fuentes alternativas de energía e invertir miles de millones de dólares más en educación.

Al mismo tiempo, desea reestructurar el código fiscal para quitar más carga a los trabajadores de clase media y baja y dársela a los ricos, revirtiendo la brecha de ingresos. Algunas de sus ideas

han atraído críticas, principalmente entre los republicanos, que consideran que su plan revivirá la lucha de clases, hundirá a los ricos y pondrá demasiada carga sobre las empresas, en tiempos difíciles.

Ayer mismo, fuentes de la Casa Blanca dijeron que Obama nominará a la gobernadora de Kansas, Kathleen Sebelius, como secretaria de Salud y Servicios Humanos. Las fuentes añadieron que Sebelius aceptó ya y que el anuncio formal se haría este lunes.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the market for CO2 credits.](#)

Los mercados de bonos de CO2

Las "bolsas del medioambiente"

Rafael Cores

Univision.com, Sunday, March 1, 2009

MIAMI - La emisión de gases de efecto invernadero a la atmósfera es la causa principal del calentamiento global, según dice la mayoría de científicos y pocos ya se atreven a discutir. Por tanto, se volvió patente en los últimos años que la humanidad en conjunto necesita recortar el volumen de esas emisiones para continuar teniendo un planeta habitable.

Un mercado con un propósito

Algunos países, como los integrantes de la Unión Europea, aprobaron legislaciones que obligan a las empresas –principalmente a aquéllas que generan energía o a las grandes fábricas- a reducir sus emisiones. Otros muchos, entre los que no está Estados Unidos, se comprometieron con el protocolo de Kyoto a controlar sus emisiones de gases contaminantes por debajo de un tope.

Para lograr esos objetivos se creó, entre otras medidas, el concepto de "bonos de carbono", un sistema internacional por el que se premia a las empresas que reducen sus emisiones y se penaliza a aquéllas que las incrementan.

Básicamente, un bono de carbono es el derecho a enviar a la atmósfera una tonelada de CO2 (dióxido de carbono). Así por ejemplo, si al final del año una compañía eléctrica a la que las autoridades de su país le han puesto un límite de emisión de 100,000 toneladas de CO2 anuales se pasa y emite 10,000 más, tendrá que presentar bonos de carbono equivalentes a ese exceso. Esos bonos los puede comprar u obtener a través de proyectos certificados como reductores de emisiones.

"El mercado de bonos permite a las empresas reducir sus emisiones de la forma más barata posible", explica Graham Cooper, presidente de las publicaciones Environmental Finance, especializadas en temas medioambientales.

Tres tipos de bonos principales

No todos los bonos son iguales. Las diferencias radican en las leyes que los exigen.

La Unión Europea regula las emisiones de sus países miembros, por lo que ha creado un sistema de bonos propio. A raíz del protocolo de Kyoto surgieron otros bonos: los que son aceptados por los países firmantes para cumplir sus objetivos. El tercer tipo de bonos se creó como alternativa en los países no firmantes en Kyoto, como Estados Unidos, donde algunas empresas reducen sus emisiones de forma voluntaria, sin la necesidad de una ley que les obligue.

Las exigencias de cada tipo de bono son diferentes. Lo que para Kyoto significa atajar la emisión de una tonelada de gases puede que no cumpla los estándares de la Unión Europea, más exigentes. Por sus partes, los bonos voluntarios no están regulados por ningún país u organización internacional, lo que genera muchas dudas sobre la credibilidad de muchos de ellos.

Todos estos bonos se compran y se venden. Pero cada uno de los tres tipos tiene un precio diferente. La idea fundamental detrás del mercado de bonos es que sea más rentable para las empresas emitir menos gases, lo que en consecuencia las llevará a sistemas de producción más eficiente y al lanzamiento de proyectos verdes que califiquen para conseguir bonos.

Europa marca la pauta

En el caso de la Unión Europea se le impuso a cada país un tope anual de emisiones según el número de toneladas de CO₂ que cada territorio había enviado a la atmósfera durante los años anteriores. A su vez, cada uno de los miembros de la unión "repartió" ese tope entre las grandes empresas emisoras de gases a la atmósfera –plantas de energía, grandes fábricas, etc–.

De este modo, las empresas comienzan cada año con un número de bonos otorgados –gratis– por la propia Unión Europea, es decir, con el permiso para emitir hasta un límite. Si una empresa no alcanza ese límite, le quedarán bonos sin utilizar que, si lo desea, puede vender a otra empresa europea que haya superado su límite.

Para regular ese mercado de bonos se creó el Esquema de Mercado Europeo de Emisiones de Gases de Efecto de Invernadero (European Union Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme, EU ETS), que controla los European Union Allowances (EUAs), el nombre oficial de los bonos de CO₂ válidos en la Unión Europea.

Hasta ahora las empresas europeas reciben gratis esos bonos para poder contaminar. Pero en el futuro se espera que tengan que pagar por ellos, quizá acudiendo a una subasta con el resto de compañías.

Los bonos CDM de Kyoto

Los países firmantes del protocolo de Kyoto se comprometieron en 1997 a reducir en un 5 por ciento -respecto a 1990- las emisiones de seis tipos de gases causantes del calentamiento global: el propio dióxido de carbono (CO₂), metano (CH₄), óxido nitroso (N₂O), hidrofluorocarbonos (HFC), perfluorocarbonos (PFC) y hexafluoruro de azufre (SF₆).

El objetivo se debe cumplir para 2012. Es decir, si en 1990 se emitía 100, para el final de 2012 se deberá emitir 95. Con la salvedad de que no todos los países tienen que reducir sus emisiones igual: cada uno tiene asignada su cuota de reducción para lograr ese recorte de 5 por ciento entre todos. En el reparto, los países industrializados tienen un compromiso mayor de recorte de emisiones que aquéllos en vías de desarrollo.

Para lograr ese objetivo se creó un sistema controlado por entidades de Naciones Unidas, el Clean Development Mechanism (Mecanismo de Desarrollo Limpio), que permite a gobiernos y empresas de los países industrializados a desarrollar proyectos de reducción de emisiones en países en vías de desarrollo.

Esos proyectos generan Reducciones Certificadas de Emisiones: los bonos CER (por sus siglas en inglés). Al obtenerse gracias a proyectos en países en vías de desarrollo, las empresas logran reducir sus emisiones a un precio menor que si lo tuvieran que hacer en sus países y, además, exportan tecnología limpia.

Estos bonos CER también se compran y se venden, aunque a un precio algo inferior a los de la Unión Europea. Además, su futuro es incierto a partir de 2012, cuando expira el protocolo de Kyoto.

Las V.E.R. y el CO2 en Estados Unidos

Estados Unidos firmó el protocolo de Kyoto pero nunca lo ratificó. En 2001 el gobierno de Bush se retiró del protocolo argumentando que es ineficiente e injusto al involucrar sólo a los países industrializados y excluir de las restricciones a algunos de los grandes emisores, como China e India.

Pero eso no quiere decir que en Estados Unidos no haya empresas comprometidas con reducir sus emisiones. Para ese "mercado" se crearon las Reducciones Voluntarias de Emisiones (VER, por sus siglas en inglés), bonos no regulados, sin requerimiento legal, que también se compran y venden, pero a un precio y volumen muy inferior a los anteriores y sin que exista un mercado estable aún.

El futuro del CO2 en EU

Pero esa situación puede cambiar con la llegada de Obama a la presidencia, durante la cual se espera una ley para la reducción de emisiones.

Cuando la ley se apruebe, lo más probable es que se instaure un sistema parecido al de la Unión Europea, con unos bonos de carbonos regulados, explica Wiley Barbour, fundador de American Carbon Registry, una organización sin ánimo de lucro que registra bonos de carbono voluntarios.

Barbour asegura que aunque la legislación se mueva rápido en el Congreso, pasarán al menos cuatro o cinco años hasta que la Agencia de Protección del Medioambiente (EPA) redacte los detalles de la norma y sea efectiva.

Mientras tanto, su organización trabaja con aquellas empresas que quieren estar preparadas de antemano. Por ello sólo registran proyectos de reducción de emisiones bajo un seguimiento estricto que, cuando llegue la ley, espera sean canjeables por los bonos regulados.

"La legislación tratará de no penalizar a las compañías que están intentando hacer bien las cosas ahora", argumenta Barbour, miembro del Grupo Intergubernamental sobre el Cambio Climático que fue premiado con el Nobel de la Paz en el 2007.

Un mercado en expansión

Los "registros de carbono" como el de Barbour son fundamentales en el engranaje de este mercado: certifican cuánto bonos tiene una empresa o un proyecto que genera energía limpia o que evita que se envíen gases de efectos invernadero a la atmósfera. Aportan credibilidad al producto, al bono, que se transmite del vendedor al comprador. Además, toman nota de la transacción y llevan el registro durante toda la vida de un bono de carbono.

"El registro es fundamental porque prueba que existen esos bonos de carbono", explica Helen Robinson, directora del registro TZ1, con sedes en Londres, Nueva York, San Francisco, Beijing y Auckland.

Algunos registros también ponen en contacto a compradores y vendedores de bonos.

En 2008, el American Carbon Registry facilitó la venta de 3 millones de toneladas de CO2 en bonos, de las cuales 1.4 millones fueron "retiradas" por sus compradores, es decir, utilizadas para argumentar que esas empresas dejaron una huella menor de emisiones.

Pero donde de verdad se mueve –y se hace– dinero es en los mercados de carbono más regulados, como los de la Unión Europea. El más importante es el BlueNext de París, una "bolsa del medioambiente" propiedad del NYSE (New York Stock Exchange) y el Caisse des Dépôt, banco del estado francés, que acapara más del 90 por ciento de los intercambios de bonos de la Unión Europea (EUAs).

Entre los 85 miembros de BlueNext se encuentran grandes empresas eléctricas, brokers, y grandes bancos como Citigroup, JP Morgan o Morgan Stanley, explica Philippe Chauvancy, director de ventas de BlueNext.

En BlueNext también confían en que Estados Unidos regule sus emisiones a corto plazo, por lo que ya están abriendo una sucursal en Nueva York para seguir bien posicionados en un mercado que movió 180 mil millones de euros en 2008 (\$230 mil millones), el doble que un año antes.

Algunos inversores de riesgo también han visto la oportunidad y están comprando bonos en registros como el de Barbour por unos \$5 la tonelada, con la esperanza de que su valor se multiplique en caso de que la nueva ley los acepte como bonos legítimos en el futuro.

Pero, además del beneficio económico para algunos y los empleos que puede generar esta economía verde, ¿ayuda realmente a proteger el medio ambiente?

Para Barbour, la idea de poner un precio a emitir CO2 ayuda a que las empresas reduzcan sus emisiones. La legislación establece objetivos y reglas, pero crea el mercado para dejar abierto el camino hasta ese objetivo. El mercado le da a las compañías la libertad para decidir cómo y cuándo llegar a su objetivo en reducciones de la forma más eficiente y económica, explica.

Chauvancy coincide en la idea y cita un estudio del MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) que argumenta que en los tres primeros años de funcionamiento de los mercados estos generaron una reducción de emisiones de CO2 de 100 millones de toneladas.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the green tax on infrastructure and fuel.](#)

La tenencia como impuesto verde

Andres Loeza

El Universal, Saturday, Feb. 28, 2009

Desde su campaña presidencial Felipe Calderón se comprometió a abolir la tenencia. Fox había hecho lo mismo, y de vez en cuando sale un candidato del PRD o PRI que hace del tema su bandera.

No hay duda: es un tema popular entre las clases medias, que a veces asumen la abolición de la tenencia como reclamo histórico contra los males del gobierno (vale la pena notar, por ejemplo, en el DF, sólo 23% de la población se mueve en coche).

Sin embargo, quitarla sería un error. Aunque originalmente no se pensó así, hoy es un impuesto verde que le da envidia a muchos países. No es el impuesto verde ideal, pero en términos ambientales la peor

tenencia es la que no existe. La ventaja de la tenencia hoy está en que encarece la compra y uso de autos. Hay varios argumentos para sostener que la reducción del uso de éstos es deseable.

Uno es el calentamiento global: los autos en el mundo contribuyen de manera importante a la generación de CO2. Por eso una parte central de las estrategias contra el calentamiento global es hacer coches que consuman menos gasolina o promover el uso de otro tipo de transportes.

El segundo es la calidad del aire y la salud. Como ha demostrado el tiempo, en el DF no sólo la presencia de industria contaminante empeoraba la calidad del aire, sino sobre todo el uso de coches. Entre más se usan, más contaminación. Las enfermedades respiratorias abundan, tienen que ver con la contaminación proveniente de la combustión de gasolina y algunas, como el asma, representan una carga para nuestro sistema de salud.

El tercero es la vida urbana. Hoy la construcción de infraestructura urbana ha privilegiado el uso del auto sobre la vida peatonal o incluso el transporte público masivo. Quienes hemos vivido a lado de grandes ejes viales sabemos que la vida no es mejor cuando sólo te puedes mover en coche. Cuando éstos dominan en la toma de decisiones de las autoridades, su imaginación se limita a construir muchos pasos a desnivel, pero pocas banquetas, parques, transporte público e iluminación.

El cuarto argumento es fiscal. La tenencia como impuesto tiene dos ventajas. La primera es que los recursos son para los gobiernos estatales. Si en México hay algún grado de descentralización, es justo porque hay más recursos en los estados. Un estado sin recursos no es estado. La segunda es que es un impuesto progresivo y fácil de cobrar. Quienes lo pagan son personas que normalmente tienen ingresos más altos, y es difícil que se escapen de pagarlo. En México hay pocos impuestos tan efectivos.

A pesar de estas ventajas, diputados del PAN y de otros partidos están a punto de cometer un acto de demagogia fiscal justo antes de las elecciones (uno de los ejes de campaña de Calderón era proteger el ambiente). Su desesperación por conseguir votos es tal, que van a encarecer la defensa del ambiente y abaratar la contaminación. Quitar la tenencia, pese a sus deficiencias, sería un error que quienes creemos en proteger el ambiente no podríamos perdonar.

Las objeciones a la tenencia como impuesto verde son atendibles. Es verdad que no está diseñado de tal manera que cobra más al que más contamina. Pero tal es la discusión necesaria. Cómo hacer de la tenencia un mejor impuesto verde es una pregunta más interesante que cómo deshacerse de la tenencia. También es verdad que los gobernantes no rinden cuentas, pero para eso tenemos que exigir y denunciar más, no cobrar menos impuestos.

Si la Cámara de Diputados logra abolir la tenencia, es difícil imaginar que la poderosa industria automotriz permita que se diseñe un impuesto verde en contra de sus intereses. En todo caso, tanto ciudadan@s como diputad@s tenemos que provocar la discusión para poder tener el mejor diseño posible. Si lo que resulta de este extraño impuesto es un buen impuesto verde sobre el uso de coches, seremos un ejemplo para el mundo de lo que se puede hacer bien, no sólo de lo que se hace mal.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses proposal to raise EPA budget to an unprecedented level.](#)

Elevan presupuesto para EPA a niveles sin precedente

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009

El presidente, Barack Obama propuso triplicar prácticamente el presupuesto de la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental, la EPA, de tres mil 900 a diez mil 500 millones de dólares para

el año fiscal 2010. Es un aumento sin precedentes y el primero que se propone para la EPA en los últimos ocho años, el período que duró la pasada administración del ex presidente George W. Bush. Los fondos se destinarán a programas de preservación y contra el cambio climático de gobiernos estatales y locales, así como de naciones nativas estadounidenses. La propuesta del presidente considera que para el 2012 la EPA cobre a las empresas permisos por generar contaminación ligada a la producción.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses 10 thousand youths will unite in DC to meet in favor of climate and the economy.](#)

10 mil jóvenes se reúnen en DC por acción inmediata en favor del clima y la economía

Los jóvenes se preparan políticamente y presionan para buscar un cambio significativo respecto al clima y las leyes energéticas

Power Shift '09, Washington, D.C

Radio Bilingue, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009

Washington, D.C.—27 de febrero al 2 de marzo. Al menos 10,000 líderes jóvenes de todo el país se reunirán en el evento Power Shift '09 en Washington, D.C. para exigir del presidente y del Congreso una adopción de políticas de clima y energéticas significativas, las cuales den prioridad a la energía renovable, la creación de empleos ecológicos, y la limitación agresiva de las emisiones de carbono.

“La juventud estadounidense respondió en cantidades récord para elegir un nuevo presidente y Congreso. Estamos hoy aquí para llenar el lugar que nos corresponde en la mesa política”, señaló Jessy Tolkan, director de Power Shift y organizador de Energy Action Coalition. “Estamos en un momento crucial de la historia de nuestro país. Tenemos la oportunidad de trabajar con nuestros nuevos dirigentes y así construir una nueva economía ecológica, para que de esta manera abordemos nuestra crisis climática al aprobar una legislación de políticas climáticas y energéticas audaces. No dejaremos que este momento pase de largo”.

La cumbre Power Shift '09 da comienzo el viernes, 27 de febrero y líderes jóvenes. Finalizará el lunes, 2 de marzo, con un gran evento multitudinario y día de cabildeo en Capitol Hill. En esta cumbre de cuatro días también habrá lo siguiente:

Seminarios, mesas de discusión y talleres.

Una feria laboral ecológica.

Informes legislativos y capacitación de activistas.

Un día de acción, en donde miles de jóvenes inundarán los salones del Congreso para cabildear a sus representantes.

“Jóvenes de todo el país que han dirigido la lucha por un futuro de energía limpia en nuestros campus y comunidades se unirán en Power Shift '09/2009 para aprender unos de otros y exigir que el presidente y el Congreso tomen nuestra bandera”, expresó Dominique Hazzard, estudiante de primer año de la universidad Wellesley College.

Acerca de Power Shift '09

Power Shift '09 es organizada por Energy Action Coalition, la cual ha crecido en los últimos cuatro años para dar cabida a 50 organizaciones nacionales, más de 700 grupos locales, y cientos de miles de jóvenes que trabajan juntos para luchar de manera efectiva por soluciones

energéticas limpias, y por la creación de una economía ecológica nueva. Para obtener más información, visita www.powershift09.org

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses New York is the second city with the most traffic congestion in the US.

Nueva York es la segunda ciudad más congestionada de EE.UU.

La Ciudad de Nueva York aparece por segundo año consecutivo entre las ciudades más congestionadas de Estados Unidos, según un estudio revelado por Inix, una empresa que analiza el tránsito vehicular.

Terra, Friday, Feb. 27, 2009

Nueva York, (Notimex).- La ciudad de los rascacielos es la segunda con mayor congestión en el tráfico, después de Los Angeles.

La intersección entre Cross Bronx Expressway y Bronx River Parkway fue considerada como el peor lugar donde se registran embotellamientos en el país.

En este punto se pueden ver hasta 94 horas de tráfico por semana con una velocidad promedio de sólo 17 kilómetros por hora.

Cinco de los seis peores embotellamientos del país tuvieron lugar en la ciudad, y algunos conductores sostienen que estas vías ponen a prueba la paciencia de los usuarios.

Entre las cinco ciudades más congestionadas se encuentran también Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth y Washington.

La información del tránsito fue reunida utilizando miles de millones de datos proporcionados por autos y camiones equipados con el sistema GPS de posicionamiento global.

Investigadores sostienen que la congestión de tránsito a nivel nacional cayó cerca de 30 por ciento el año pasado, aparentemente como resultado del aumento del precio del combustible y el crecimiento del desempleo.

Terra USA/Notimex