

Sunday, April 19, 2009

Go slow on enacting global warming regs

Agriculture, business and local government leaders in the valley regularly resist state mandates – and often with good reason.

There's a predictable resentment toward being told what to do. But on top of that, there's usually a larger – and more legitimate – concern over cost. The sense is that Sacramento orders big steak dinners and the locals have to provide them on hamburger budgets.

The recession has only exacerbated these feelings. Now, business and governments face myriad regulations to implement the state's sweeping Global Warming Solutions Act, known as Assembly Bill 32.

The legislation, passed in 2006, makes California a worldwide leader in addressing the impact of climate change. We agree with the goals. There's persuasive evidence of the long-term risks associated with greenhouse gases. That was underscored Friday with the Environmental Protection Agency's announcement that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will be listed as pollutants.

However, we share the concerns of ag, business and local governments that the state's regulations are coming too fast and with too high a price tag in this horrible economy.

This month, the Modesto City Council and the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors voted to support Senate Bill 295, which would delay AB 32 regulations until more thorough cost analyses are done – and until the statewide unemployment rate is closer to the normal 5 percent to 6 percent. Currently, it's twice that for the state and three times that for Stanislaus County.

SB 295 will be heard Monday in the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality. It's given little chance to be enacted for a number of purely political reasons: It was written by a Republican; it would require two-thirds approval to pass as an urgent matter; and, ultimately, because global warming is one of the governor's pet projects.

We understand all that, but we hope that state leaders, including the governor and the California Air Resources Board, will nonetheless hear the message of SB 295.

It's more important to implement AB 32 effectively than it is to rush into regulations that may not accomplish what they're designed to do or that may impose crushing burdens on businesses and farms.

Even AB 32 supporters are asking reasonable questions about the scoping plan adopted in December by the air board.

The independent and reliable Legislative Analyst's Office found serious weaknesses in the economic analyses done by the air board. It agreed to more thorough estimates by the end

of 2009. Meanwhile, however, it has started adopting rules that will go into effect as soon as 2010.

Assemblyman Bill Berryhill, R-Ceres, has signed on as a co-author of SB 295. He says his goal is not to gut AB 32 but to slow it down so that the rules don't end up eliminating jobs in a state where the unemployment rate has hit 11 percent. Furthermore, he believes the technology is close to being able to achieve many of the greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Those are both good arguments for the state to move deliberately rather than hastily.

The Global Warming Solutions Act is admirable, but the solutions must be achieved without crushing the fragile budgets of businesses, farmers and local governments.