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Putting the heat on faltering economy

Here's a reality check for California's global-warming bureaucrats

Thanks to worldwide economic difficulties, enthusiasm has waned for a costly remake of society to combat so-called global warming. Thank goodness.

Unfortunately, that hasn't stopped California state government from rushing ahead with the nation's most ambitious plan to save the world by crippling the economy, subsidizing boondoggles and driving up consumers' costs, all in the name of curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

The state Air Resources Board recently released 142 pages of regulations to manipulate consumers, coerce manufacturers and drain the public purse. Before the state goes much farther, California's elected leaders should look around for a reality check.

Canadian voters last week decisively rejected an energy tax to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Italy and Poland led a revolt of eight poorer countries and recently won a right to veto the European Union's upcoming climate control plan because it increasingly is viewed as too expensive for an economy headed for recession.

Germany's environmental minister "evidently no longer considers climate goals that important," reports the German publication Die Welt. "Which is why he now lobbies the EU to defuse the severe emission conditions for carmakers."

Time Magazine acknowledged the trend, noting the EU's costly bank rescue plan "might have provided perfect cover for a retreat from their longstanding commitment to reduce Europe's overall CO2 emissions."

"Europe's sudden about-face is an acknowledgment ... that the economic crisis renders void plenty of grandiose plans," wrote Keith Johnson in the Wall Street Journal's Environmental Capital blog. "The obvious question is whether Europe's cold feet are a harbinger of what will happen when Congress considers mandatory greenhouse-gas limits in the U.S."

Indeed, the aversion to imposing economic upheaval to reduce greenhouse gases is growing in Washington, where only months ago fighting global warming was a top priority – until it became obvious the extreme costs were too much to pay on top of soaring energy prices. Now neither presidential candidate dwells on the subject unless prodded by the press. Only 1 percent rated global warming as the most important campaign issue, according to new research at Yale and George Mason universities.

Economic hard times make it even harder for Californians to pay the high costs of curbing greenhouse gases through the state's new regulatory labyrinth of mandatory restrictions, required offsets, enforced reductions and an as-yet-undefined cap-and-trade, faux market scheme to penalize businesses that don't reduce emissions to state-approved levels.

"With this tough economy, a financial industry crisis and a growing state fiscal problem, we need to make sure that the climate change program does not make the situation worse," said Betty Jo Toccoli, president of the California Small Business Association. We agree with the Competitive Enterprise Institute's Iain Murray, who says, "The world has realized that the greenhouse gas reductions championed by Al Gore and his fellow travelers come at a very high price, at both the national and household level."

It's time for California's government to come to the same conclusion