

Sunday March 1, 2009

Scrutinize climate plan

Air board member Roberts should throw weight behind Senate bill

In a fashion disturbingly reminiscent of the state Legislature's frenzied approval of a deeply flawed energy deregulation bill in 1996, the California Air Resources Board on Dec. 11 hastily approved the "Scoping Plan" for implementation of the landmark 2006 state law requiring the use of cleaner but more costly types of energy.

Nothing was going to stop the air board from approving the plan and launching into an orgy of self-congratulation for leading the fight against global warming.

Not the warning by the nation's leading environmental economist. Harvard's Robert Stavins was asked by the air board to review its study claiming that the switch to costlier energy would provide a major boost to the state's economy. He said it was so "terribly deficient" that it would harm efforts to deal with climate change.

Not the warning by UCLA economist Matthew Kahn, who was also asked to "peer review" the study. He said sharply higher energy costs mandated by the new rules would take a heavy toll on California manufacturers and their 1.5 million employees.

Not the warning by the Legislative Analyst's Office that the study wasn't based on science.

Now, however, Sen. Bob Dutton, R-Rancho Cucamonga, is pushing the air board for a do-over. He's introduced a bill to delay implementation of the board's regulations until it re-evaluates their economic impacts, starting with the concerns raised by peer reviewers and the LAO.

This is a great idea. Especially with the economy in free fall, saddling California businesses with unique costs on bogus grounds is suicidal.

We hope county Supervisor Ron Roberts – an air board member – agrees. He joined in the unanimous vote for the scoping plan in December. Three weeks later, however, he said in a Union-Tribune Q&A that the air board staff's predictions of economic gains "were unsupportedly optimistic." He said it was crucial to have "fair and effective rules based on science and economic understanding."

If Roberts really believes this, then he should be the first person to say it's time the air board revisited its AB 32 plan.