

# Ferguson: Energy Matters

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## CARBon Politics

Governor Schwarzenegger's decision last week to oust Robert Sawyer as chair of the California Air Resources Board had the seemingly perfect cover story—CARB wasn't doing enough to reduce air pollution. The problem with the story is that no one believes it, least of all Air Board executive director Catherine Witherspoon who angrily resigned a few days later.

Accusing the Air Board of not regulating polluters aggressively enough is like accusing water of not being wet enough. Certainly many of the Governor's supporters don't believe this is true. The claim that Sawyer was fired because the Air Board approved the San Joaquin air district's plan to seek delays in attainment just doesn't wash.

Witherspoon's assertion—that the Governor's office was determined to derail the Air Board's plans to implement the state's aggressive global warming law—is much more credible.

Meetings with the Governor's staff indicate an almost mystical belief that “the market” can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and no further oversight whatsoever is needed. This belief allows the Governor to tour the world and be hailed as a green hero without having to deal with worrisome realities. Alas, no pain no gain, as every body-builder knows.

I have briefed the Governor's staff and the Air Board in recent months on the changes that will be needed in the electricity sector if the state's climate goals are to be met. The required changes are not at all mystical—everyone in the electricity industry knows what they are:

- Limit consumption to the extent possible;
- Stop buying power from polluting coal-fired plants; and
- Develop non-fossil energy resources quickly.

None of this is going to happen without aggressive regulations from the Air Board, which was given that responsibility in last year's AB 32, the “California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.” What is required of polluters must be made crystal clear, and there must be significant penalties for non-compliance.

Furthermore, other state agencies will have to ensure that infrastructure is in place to make possible the dramatic changes required of the electricity industry. For example, the state's electric transmission system will require a major overhaul. This isn't going to happen through the "magic of the marketplace".

Politicians now basking in the glow of world leadership on global warming need to understand that there is a real world outside Sacramento that is unaffected by rhetoric. In the real world, transmission projects take several years to plan and much more time to build. Getting steel in the ground takes a lot more work than getting your picture on the cover of Time Magazine.

The Governor's office acted quickly to limit the damage they did at the Air Board by appointing Mary Nichols as Sawyer's replacement. Nichols is a seasoned veteran at the state and federal level and no stranger to political infighting. She's an excellent choice for the job.

However, the situation at the Air Board will degenerate further unless the Governor's office gets as serious about reducing carbon emissions as it is about getting credit for promising to do so. The politicians took on a huge challenge when they declared war on global warming. At the time, they had no idea what would be required for success, but that is no longer an excuse.

We know what needs to be done in the real world to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the electricity sector. We know it will take a monumental effort to achieve the 2020 reduction targets. What we don't know is whether the Governor is serious about making this effort or not. The Air Board fiasco is not a promising sign.

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