

Support air cleanup rules

[The Bakersfield Californian Editorial](#)

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State Sen. Dean Florez's controversial campaign to bring the agricultural industry into California's clean-air fight faces a critical vote today.

Three bills in the Kern County Democrat's eight-bill air cleanup agenda will be considered by the Senate. If approved, the bills will move to the Assembly, where they will undergo more hearings and votes.

Florez's aggressive legislative program seeks to impose air cleanup rules on an industry that has been generally exempted for years.

As with all legislation, Florez's bills will be massaged, changed and some even dropped in the give-and-take of the political process.

No doubt environmentalists pushing for tough controls will not be completely satisfied. No doubt industry proponents, who wish to have pollution controls remain "voluntary" will not be satisfied.

But at the end of the day, we all must hope the rules that survive will make the valley's air a bit cleaner and the valley's residents a bit healthier.

Florez's air cleanup agenda deserves support. This week, the Fresno City Council gave its support. Other valley cities, including Bakersfield, will be asked to concur.

The eight-county San Joaquin Valley is one of the most polluted air basins in the nation. The highest rate of childhood asthma in California is recorded in the basin.

State and local regulators face increasing pressure from the federal government, and health and environmental groups to drastically cut smog by 2005 or risk sanctions that could freeze up to \$2 billion in federal transportation funds and prevent industries from operating.

The bills the Senate will consider today include SB 700 to end agriculture's exemption from air cleanup rules; SB 705 to phase out open-field agricultural burning; and SB 707 to establish buffers between dairies and urban uses, such as cities and schools.

During a meeting with *The Californian's* editorial board Tuesday, Florez noted that these bills have been amended to consider agriculture's concerns. Additional changes are expected before they are signed into law.

Other Florez bills headed for a Senate vote or future hearings include SB 701, which proposed \$4.5 billion in bonds to help agriculture comply with new air cleanup rules; SB 703 to remove electricity "standby charges" to power irrigation pumps; and SB 704 to require biomass plants to burn mostly ag waste.

SB 708, which targets grossly polluting vehicles, was amended to target only the worst offenders after classic car buffs complained. And SB 709 proposes to expand the power of the valley air pollution board and add \$2 to the cost of vehicle licenses to pay for control measures.

Two bills, SB 702 to provide funds to convert polluting diesel agricultural equipment and SB 706 to phase out use of residential fireplaces, have been put on hold.

The bills targeting agriculture should not be interpreted as an attempt to blame the area's air pollution problems on this vital industry. State regulators estimate 25 percent of the valley's smog-forming gases are generated by farming activities. Cars and trucks produce about 40 percent.

Voluntary cleanup steps are not enough. Like all other industries, agriculture needs rules that are practical and enforceable.

Agriculture is not the bad guy causing the valley's air pollution. But it is a contributor. It must be an active partner in the solution.

Standing up for air

Florez takes Fresno City Council support into battle over ag permits.

[Fresno Bee Editorial](#) (Published Thursday, May 22, 2003, 4:46 AM)

The first of several pieces of crucial air quality legislation will hit the floor of the state Senate today with the backing of the Fresno City Council, thanks to a majority of council members who voted to support the bills on Tuesday.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, the author of the bills, appeared before the council to ask for its support, which he found from five council members -- Council President Tom Boyajian and members Mike Dages, Brad Castillo, Henry T. Perea and Cynthia Sterling.

Those council members deserve praise for their commitment to cleaner air.

Council Member Jerry Duncan voted against the measure, and Brian Calhoun abstained. Calhoun said he needs to learn more about the Florez bills. That's an acceptable reason for abstaining, perhaps, though a bit curious -- the legislation has been written about extensively and the broader issue of air quality has been Topic A hereabouts for at least the past six months.

Duncan said it was premature to take a stand on bills that may change in the legislative process, and echoed the complaint of the ag industry that it is being put in peril by the legislation. We can expect to hear more of the same from opponents of these bills as they move through the Senate and Assembly, and that's unfortunate.

The bills before the Senate today are SB 700, which would require farmers to obtain pollution permits for diesel-powered irrigation pumps and for confined-animal feeding operations such as dairies. Florez calls it the linchpin of his legislation. SB 705 would phase out in-field burning of agricultural waste by 2010. SB 707 would hold new dairies or dairy expansions to the same provisions required of large industrial facilities under the California Environmental Quality Act. It's good that Florez has the backing of the city of Fresno in this effort.

Ag interests feel singled out for too much of the blame for our poor air, and it's true that much of the Florez package focuses on ag. But that's more a matter of being first in line than being singled out -- every sector of our economy and our community will be affected by the changes we must make for the sake of cleaner air.

[From Yahoo News, May 21st:](#)

EPA Chief Christie Whitman Resigns

WASHINGTON - Christie Whitman resigned as Environmental Protection Agency (news - web sites) administrator on Wednesday, weary after two and a half years of struggles with fellow Bush officials, Congress and business and environmental groups.

"Halfway through last December, I was ... saying 'Do I really want to live this lifestyle for another two and a half years?' It was pretty apparent I didn't," she told reporters.

Whitman, who differed with the White House on issues ranging from global warming (news - web sites) to power plant pollution, informed President Bush (news - web sites) of her decision during a half-hour meeting in the Oval Office on Tuesday afternoon.

She told the president that she considered her tenure at the EPA rewarding professionally, but that it was time to return to her home and husband in New Jersey.

"I said, 'It's time to go. He said, 'I know,'" Whitman said. She plans to step down on June 27.

With Whitman's departure, Bush loses one of the most prominent women in his Cabinet — a moderate former New Jersey governor selected by the president to help soften his image as a political conservative, particularly on environmental issues.

Bush called Whitman a trusted friend and adviser who worked "to achieve real and meaningful results to improve our environment."

White House officials, who sought to deflect any suggestion Whitman had been forced out, said it would be weeks before a replacement would be named.

The president will be under pressure to appoint someone acceptable to his conservative GOP supporters and the business community, but not alienate moderate Republicans and swing voters who favor increased environmental protection.

Whitman's departure is an "opportunity for revolution" if Bush appoints a successor inclined toward less regulation, said the conservative Competitive Enterprise (news - web sites) Institute.

But Fred Krupp, president of Environmental Defense, said the next EPA administrator "must be an independent voice for public health and the environment" in a Cabinet already heavily leaning toward business interests.

Among those mentioned as possible replacements: David Struhs, who heads Florida's environmental protection department; Josephine Cooper, president of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, who formerly worked at the EPA; and former Michigan Gov. John Engler.

Meeting with reporters, Whitman cited as accomplishments: reducing pollution from off-road diesel engines; restoring low-level pollution sites known as "brownfields;" a push to cut pollution from school buses; a number of pollution-reduction settlements with industry.

Addressing her differences with the White House, Whitman said, "I wouldn't characterize them as conflicts. I mean, dynamic discussions, yes. But that's what happens all the time."

Whitman clashed with senior White House officials and others in the administration over how best to address climate change, arsenic levels in drinking water, and industry complaints that EPA's air pollution rules were stymieing efficiency improvements.

Within months of coming to the EPA, Whitman in a memo to Bush called global warming "a credibility issue for the U.S. in the international community" and said "we need to appear engaged." A short time later, the president withdrew from the climate talks.

It "was a little awkward," she acknowledged Wednesday, when asked about the new U.S. policy on climate change.

Whitman also expressed frustration over the administration's handling of allowable arsenic levels in drinking water — first rescinding the regulation altogether, then, after a public outcry, agreeing to go along with the tougher standards that Whitman had urged.

Whitman also favored enforcement of a Clean Air Act provision known as "New Source Review," requiring that any increase in production from older factories, power plants and refineries be accompanied by state-of-the-art pollution controls. The regulations were criticized widely within the White House. The EPA eased them last December.

Secretary of State Colin Powell (news - web sites) once joked that Whitman was the administration's "wind dummy," a military phrase for something pushed out the door of a plane before landing to check wind direction.

"I've never felt humiliated. ... You know you can't take any of this personally," Whitman said Wednesday when reminded of Powell's characterization.

Sen. James Jeffords (news - web sites), I-Vt., said Whitman "brought grace and leadership to the EPA at a trying time and did the best job she could under very challenging circumstances."

Whitman joined the administration after seven years as governor of New Jersey, where she made preservation a priority but never managed to convince environmentalists she was one of them. She occasionally had been talked about as a potential GOP vice presidential candidate.

Whitman said her decision to step down was helped when she received a bouquet of roses from her husband, John, an investment banker. "When he gave

me flowers for Mother's Day that said, 'Welcome home,' I knew I'd made the right decision," she said.

Keep at it

[Fresno Bee Letter to the Editor](#)

By Ann McCartney

Fresno

(Published Thursday, May 22, 2003, 4:47 AM)

I thank Michael LaSalle for his balanced, well-researched and well-written May 17 commentary in The Bee.

The Bee's indisputably well-done research and the resultant reporting on the quality of Valley air and its effect on lungs is useful and appreciated. But Mr. LaSalle makes it clear that lung disease, particularly asthma, has become a major problem in other areas as well, and in non-agricultural settings.

It is obvious that blaming our setting and improving agricultural air alone is simplistic. Perhaps The Bee will utilize Mr. LaSalle's research as it continues to publish follow-up articles on this, a subject of such importance to our area