

Bush Walks a Political Tightrope on EPA

If he picks a moderate, it could anger industry allies. A conservative could aid Democrats.



By Aaron Zitner and Gary Polakovic, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers, May 23, 2003

WASHINGTON -- At an annual dinner attended by the political elite, President Bush last year aimed a few zingers at the woman he had named administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. Christie Whitman, he noted in a humorous speech, had given him a Scottish terrier.

And in return, Bush said, "I gave her EPA. Now we both have messes to clean up."

Today, the EPA itself has the potential to become a mess for the president - or at least a political challenge. The administration faces significant political risks as it goes about nominating a successor to Whitman, who announced her resignation Wednesday.

If the president chooses someone with moderate views on the role of environmental regulation, he could anger his industry allies and Republican ideologues, some of whom want to scale back requirements on business.

But if the administration names a sharp critic of environmental regulation, it could hand Democrats an issue to use against the president in the next election.

"First of all, you have the nomination processA high-profile nomination battle gets a higher profile with the public. It gets on Page 1," said Rep. Sherwood L. Boehlert (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House Science Committee.

And a prominent debate on the environment would favor Democrats, said John J. Pitney Jr., a political scientist at Claremont McKenna College.

"On an issue like this, there's more potential for mobilizing Democrats than Republicans," Pitney said.

"Unlike with education, Republicans have very little opportunity to seize the environment as an issue of their own. So, the best they can hope for is to keep it off the front page."

While few voters place the environment at the top of their list of concerns, surveys show that it is part of a constellation of issues, along with abortion and gun control, that Democrats have used to win coveted suburban voters outside the South.

"If their main concern is shoring up support from suburban voters in the 2004 election ... then I think he will choose a moderate establishment type who supports more regulation if it is done properly," said Myron Ebell, a specialist on global warming issues at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington.

Whitman, a former New Jersey governor, was chosen in part to help Bush appeal to moderate Republican voters. But her experience at the EPA might serve as a lesson if another moderate takes that job.

Views on environmental rules tend to be polarized, and Whitman seemed to please few of the EPA's constituencies. She was often out of step with the White House but enjoyed little support from environmentalists, who objected to the administration's withdrawal from negotiations on a global warming treaty and its rewriting of industrial pollution rules. At the same time, industry groups were not big supporters either.

'Awkward Situation'

"It's a tough slot to fill, and the Bush administration - they're damned both ways," said William Kovacs, vice president for environment, technology and regulatory affairs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

"If they put someone in who is pro-business, the Democrats are going to go crazy. And if they put someone in who is pro-green, I'm not sure what the Republicans would do, but that person would have a very difficult time working with the rest of the Cabinet. So it's a very awkward situation."

The ideological battle over Whitman's replacement is already underway.

"There are two camps fighting for the president's attention: those who believe that you have to be credible to the center going into the next election, and those who believe you can't please the environmentalists, no matter what you do," said Douglas Wheeler, resources secretary under former California Gov. Pete Wilson.

People following the matter cited David B. Struhs, secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, as someone who could credibly claim to be moderate and incur few political risks. Before his Florida post, Struhs was an environmental official under former Gov. William F. Weld of Massachusetts, a moderate Republican. He also is a former consultant to a gas and electric utility.

By contrast, former Michigan Gov. John Engler, a Republican and another possible candidate, is seen as more aligned with business interests, said Ken Cook, president of the Environmental Working Group, a policy advocacy group in Washington that has been critical of Bush's environmental stance. Cook said he believed this because Engler's environmental chief in Michigan was "very conservative, pro-business and anti-regulation."

Several other people have been cited as potential nominees by federal officials, business and environmental groups.

Anyone considering the job should not view it as a stepping stone to elected office, several observers said. Nearly every decision by the EPA chief has the potential to anger a large group of people while pleasing few others.

For example, Kovacs said, it is the EPA's role to tell communities that they must forfeit transportation funds and limit growth because they have failed to meet clean-air standards.

"Imagine waking up one day and having 300 communities angry at you," he said. "Every one of the decisions is like that."

"There's not much of a political career left after you leave the EPA," Kovacs added. "No matter where you go, you've got a record of being with the environmentalists or an over-burdensome regulator. Either way, you made a lot of enemies."

Job's Technical Nature

The job is also difficult because of its increasingly technical nature.

"We've picked off the obvious problems to the environment and human health - that is, rivers don't spontaneously combust anymore, the air is not so bad we have to turn on the streetlights at noon," said Paul Portney, president of Resources for the Future, an environmental think tank in Washington.

"Now, we're dealing with substances at trace levels in the environment. The pollution comes from much more diffuse sources than it used to, so this is harder to regulate. There's more argument now over what the risks are."

Major issues that will face the next administrator include Bush's clear skies initiative, which is a broad-scale revision of the Clean Air Act regulations for power plants.

The EPA is also grappling with Clean Water Act revisions that environmentalists say threaten to remove protection for wetlands, as well as pollution controls for agriculture and livestock feedlots, which affect [California's San Joaquin Valley](#).

Times staff writers Richard Simon, Frank Clifford and Miguel Bustillo also contributed to this report.

Brand new, cute, quiet and clean

By Cecilia Parsons, The Porterville Recorder, May 20, 2003

PORTERVILLE - They're noiseless, top out at 35 miles per hour and slightly resemble colorful Easter eggs, but the ten new electric vehicles in the U.S. Forest Service work yard are evidence the agency is serious about reducing air pollution.

Though the quiet, zero-emission Global Electric Motor Cars won't have much impact on the number of trips per day by Sequoia National Forest employees, they are a definite sign of a change in public awareness of the air pollution problem.

"These are the first step in what we believe will be a serious effort to reduce air pollution," said Trent Proctor, air quality program manager for Sierra Nevada national forests. The San Joaquin Valley air basin has serious non-attainment status and is one of the most polluted air basins in the nation.

Ten cars won't do much to change that status, said Jerry Martin of the California Air Resources Board, but placing them out in the public will make people more aware of new technology.

"One of the problems with new technology, such as the zero emission vehicles, is the newness - people aren't familiar with the possibilities."

The ten cars delivered recently to the Sequoia National Forest headquarters here are part of the 100 zero emission vehicles donated to the agency in California by Daimler Chrysler Corp.

The vehicles, said Proctor, will be used in administrative areas, work yards and possibly campgrounds. They aren't yet allowed on city streets or highways.

"We'll use them around here to move things. They will keep us from using full size pick-ups for little jobs," said forest service shop manager John Silva. Some of the worst sources of pollution come from idling trucks, he added, so the use of the electric vehicles for jobs will cut down on that. Silva said the agency is obligated to reduce use of fossil fuels with alternative fuel vehicles.

'This is the first step in what we believe will be a pilot program, testing alternative fuel vehicles,' Silva said.

Adding the ten new cars to the forest service fleet won't mean a lot more work in the shop. The two and four seat models just need a re-charge every 150 miles or so. The two-seat models have a flatbed for transporting materials. The vehicles are also equipped with storage areas, hour meters that show when to re-charge the batteries and a mileage gauge.

Cleaner air aim of rules

By MELANIE TURNER
MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER, May 24, 2003

Air knows no boundaries.

And so, in another step to make things more equitable between air districts, the California Air Resources Board is requiring the districts to work more effectively at reducing the volume of smog-forming pollutants blowing from one district to another.

"This regulation, which addresses stationary sources, is a nice complement to the Cardoza Smog II bill signed into law last year," said Turlock attorney DeeDee D'Adamo, who serves on the state board.

The bill by then-Assemblyman Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, forced Bay Area motorists to live under more stringent vehicle emissions rules that already applied in much of the Central Valley.

Thursday's action by the state air board requires "upwind" districts to take action to reduce smog blown on "downwind" districts.

That means the Sacramento and Bay Area air districts must lower the pollution threshold for certain businesses from 15 tons a year to match the valley's 10 tons per year, said Jerry Martin, spokesman for the Air Resources Board.

Businesses such as medium-sized manufacturing and food-processing firms and refineries, wineries and big bakeries, such as Rainbo Bread, will fall under the new limits, said Josette Merced Bello, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

New and expanding businesses subject to the 10-ton threshold will have to buy pollution credits to pollute more, Martin said.

"It's another way that the Bay Area is trying to control its pollution better so that it reduces its flow of pollution to the valley," Martin said. "This is another one of those equity issues."

If a businesses closes or reduces emissions, it gets credits that can be used later to offset increases. Credits are banked, available for other businesses to buy. The goal of the program is to ensure that no pollution is added to the air basin.

"Existing businesses would not have to observe this," Martin said. The new regulation applies to new and expanding businesses, he said.

Businesses in Sacramento and the Bay Area have been allowed to pollute more because the districts are closer than the San Joaquin Valley to meeting federal air quality standards, Martin said.

About 35 businesses in the two districts -- Sacramento and the Bay Area -- will initially be subject to the regulation, he said.

D'Adamo also made a motion Thursday that would require air board staff to review the progress of the regulation and report back to the board with other measures board members may wish to consider in the future.

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[Modesto Bee editorial, May 25, 2003:](#)

Think globally, act globally

"Think globally, act locally" has long been a motto of the environmental movement. In California, this has translated into banning new oil drilling and establishing fish sanctuaries off the coast, while reducing timber harvesting in the Sierra. But at the same time, other passions of Californians -- conspicuous consumption, single-family suburbia, SUVs and an appetite for seafood -- have only increased.

The result of this contradiction in values is detailed in the three-day special report, "State of Denial," that begins today on the front page. It details where the natural resources come from to fuel our consumption. It is not a pretty picture, but this scene doesn't have to stay that way.

The global/local approach to preservation misses the reality that everything is global these days. Nothing is more so than trade. "State of Denial" looks at trade and the rules that govern it, and at the rules -- or lack of them -- about environmental protection elsewhere on the globe.

Free trade is good. What's not good is a free ride on somebody else's environment. And this gets into some responsibilities that should be borne by both buyers and sellers in this global market.

The case of Ecuador -- an oil-rich country with a porous pipeline system that is degrading its rivers -- is a telling one. Ideally, Ecuador should be enriching its own economy and bolstering its own standard of living by selling some of this resource. Yet Ecuador and consumers of the oil, notably California, have been equally negligent at preserving the country's underlying economic base -- its environment.

Trade with a more equal partner, such as Canada, offers different challenges. The democracies of these two countries have ended up with very different rules for endangered species, logging and fishing.

Clearcutting is the logging method of choice in Canada, as is government subsidy of the industry. This serves to lower the prices of Canadian wood in California to the point that local loggers say they can't compete.

Yet even if California decided to clearcut the Sierra, suck all the oil from under the ocean and pluck every last snapper from its waters, that still wouldn't be nearly enough to fuel the engine of California's economy and Californians' lifestyles.

A big part of why California consumes so much is how California has decided to grow -- ever outward rather than up. Particularly depressing about "State of Denial" is how precious few California lifestyles, given this sprawling growth pattern, are environmentally sustainable.

In the Sacramento region, the only planet-friendly existence that reporters managed to find is one that requires living in the city's Midtown neighborhood, sharing an apartment, rarely driving and eating a vegetarian diet.

Obviously, this isn't practical for everyone. What is realistic, however, is to begin confronting the contradictions in our lifestyles and values. Locally, that means questioning patterns of growth that consider farmland as an infinite commodity to be consumed. Internationally, it means reforming trade practices, and being willing to pay more for oil from countries such as Ecuador if the money cleans up its rivers.

Think globally, act globally. That's now the world we live in.

To jump-start our creativity about seeking alternatives, an Oakland think tank, Redefining Progress, has come up with one way for each of us to measure our impact on the world -- our own ecological footprint. It can be calculated in acres. The national average is 24 acres.

For a married couple living in a 2,000-square-foot home, driving two cars, rarely using public transportation except to travel often by air, and frequently eating meat, the footprint is 34 acres. According to the think tank, we would need 7.8 planets if everyone in the world lived as that married couple does.

We hope this project will have people thinking and changing, bit by bit. And we hope you find it provocative.

To determine your environmental footprint, visit www.myfootprint.org <<http://www.myfootprint.org>>.

[The Bakersfield Californian Editorial:](#)

This donkey doesn't fly

Monday May 26, 2003, 09:40:22 PM

San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties should be allowed to go off and do its own air polluting "thing" right after we teach donkeys to fly.

A proposal for the three north valley counties to be divided from the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is a selfish bid to get an unwarranted pollution break at the expense of downwind neighbors.

The proposal should be soundly rejected by the district, state and federal air pollution regulators. Politicians, business leaders and regional planners in the three counties argue that their air is cleaner. Residents and businesses should be treated more leniently than those in dirty old Fresno, Tulare and Kern counties.

While they say the three counties should remain in the district and follow the same pollution rules, they want to be judged differently than the other valley counties.

In September, valley air district officials are expected to ask the federal Environmental Protection Agency to classify the basin an "extreme" air pollution zone.

That will give the valley until 2010 to meet air standards. While this will buy time, it comes at a price sanctions that will trigger stricter control measures.

Political and business leaders in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties plan to launch a study to prove their air doesn't stink well, at least not as much as Fresno's and Bakersfield's. Likely that is because ocean breezes from the Bay area push pollutants from the three counties into the southern San Joaquin Valley. Control pollution up north and residents in Bakersfield and Fresno have less to gag on.

Ironically, politicians, business leaders and residents in the three counties screamed their heads off pressing the Bay area to join California's Smog Check II program.

The Bay area had been exempted because powerful politicians successfully argued that their air didn't stink. Of course it didn't. Their pollution was blowing into the San Joaquin Valley.

And an outcry was heard from the same three counties when Bay area officials proposed siting a polluting power plant on the north end of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to blow its pollutants inland.

Now it seems just fine to blow pollution downwind in the district making the south counties pay the price.

Over the objections of politicians and business interests in the eight San Joaquin Valley counties, the valley air district was formed in 1992.

The district was born out of the realization that pollution does not stop at a county's boundary; the valley is all one big bowl of polluted soup; and air cleanup requires a regional, or air basin strategy.

Ironically, the politician credited with forcing the valleywide district's formation was Democrat Sen. Dan McCorquodale who represented all three now bolting counties in the state Legislature.

Julie Greene, director of the San Joaquin Council of Governments, told *The Stockton Record* that separating the three counties from the district's "extreme" air pollution zone would be a win-win solution.

It would benefit the three counties and give the district an area to point to as an air cleanup success.

To that we say: Hee haw, that donkey doesn't fly.

Still there

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee

By Richard Johansen

North Fork

(Published Tuesday, May 27, 2003, 5:40 AM)

I found it surprising to find that frequent letter contributor James R. Stone was not aware that the trails left by jet aircraft are not exhaust fumes, but contrails, trails of condensation formed when the extremely cold air found at 30,000-40,000 feet passes through extremely hot jet turbines.

It is not all that surprising though, that people who are subjected to the constant barrage of alarmist bad news provided by the "environmental movement" could find problems where none exist.

What should surprise us all is that there is still a sky for Mr. Stone to look up into, considering how often we are told by environmentalists that it is falling.

No future at all

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee

By Noelle Soto

Fresno

(Published Sunday, May 25, 2003, 5:05 AM)

Over the last school year, I have had the privilege of participating in our school's environmental science class. My spectrum of knowledge about the human and environmental situation has increased tenfold.

Not only does the issue of air pollution affect the Valley, but so do the lack of renewable resources, the problem of where to put our garbage and how many chemicals are killing our cells.

Too many citizens go through life not knowing of how deadly their environment is. The lack of intellectual stimulation about the environment and what to do about pollution is appalling and needs to be improved. Many more youths need education in environmental sciences to help them see the true way to the future. If not, a future for the world may not exist at all.

Objects to cartoon

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee

By Bill Pauli

President

California Farm Bureau Federation

Sacramento

(Published Saturday, May 24, 2003, 5:02 AM)

We object to The Bee's depiction of California agriculture's approach on proposed air quality regulations by state Sen. Dean Florez (Pam Winters cartoon May 11). Editorial cartoons can unfairly exaggerate issues and stereotype individuals.

The Farm Bureau's approach to generate sound science before heaping additional regulations on the backs of family farmers is reasonable. Recent studies strongly support gathering realistic and scientifically supported data before adopting more regulations.

New research from the University of California at Davis shows that some farming practices produce less air emissions than previously thought. In another study at California State University, Fresno, preliminary data on air samples indicate that readings of reactive organic gas levels from San Joaquin Valley dairies are less than half of past estimates. More testing is needed, but initial findings raise questions about the method state agencies have used in the past to estimate these gases.

Valley farmers are actively working to protect air quality. They make valuable voluntary contributions daily to air quality by adopting cleaner-burning engines, low-till/no-till farming methods, watering roads and growing crops that scrub damaging ozone from the atmosphere.

Existing regulations are working well. Agricultural burning has been regulated for the past 30 years. Since 1971, permits for agricultural burning have been required, allowing burning only on designated "burn days." Air districts three years ago imposed additional requirements. Farmers routinely shred orchard and vineyard prunings, which has reduced emissions.

Farmers pledge to continue to play a positive role in improving air quality while the search for better science proceeds.

Fresno's fires

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee

By Ryoichi Morita

Coarsegold

(Published Saturday, May 24, 2003, 5:02 AM)

A big fire burned for days at Archie Crippen Excavation in February. Then another big fire erupted at University Village by Fresno State just recently.

If Fresno keeps this up, it may soon become the sole contributor to the Valley's air pollution.