

## LAURA FULTZ STOUT: Bills would help Valley hit air quality goals

By Laura Fultz Stout  
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California has been immersed in a budget crisis that was as political as it was fiscal. With a budget signed and sealed, lawmakers now have a chance to come up for air-clean air. Critical environmental policy has now finally reached the governor's desk. His approval is crucial to getting California, especially the Valley, back on track.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has set aggressive goals for reducing California's global warming pollution. He campaigned on a promise to cut air pollution in half during his term. As flummoxed as we all are about the budget, two key pieces of legislation would raise new money to help us meet our clean air goals: AB 2522, by Assembly Member Juan Arambula, from which millions of dollars will support air pollution reductions in the Valley, and the Ports Investment Bill (SB 974, by state Sen. Alan Lowenthal), from which Valley residents will benefit from cleaner trucks traveling our roads to and from California's largest ports.

With a budget that tightens the belt on transportation and air quality spending, these bills are needed more than ever. The Valley is home to three of the five worst soot-and-smog-polluted regions in the country; the Valley can ill afford to delay its clean-up efforts. It has been widely reported in this paper and elsewhere that Valley air pollution costs our region \$3.2 billion every year. It is time to put more resources toward protecting the Valley families who bear so much of the financial burden of this public health crisis.

Assembly Member Juan Arambula worked closely with Sen. Dean Florez to craft AB 2522. This bill would create a new revenue stream specifically for air pollution reductions in the Valley. This money will be raised here in the Valley through car registration fees and will be used by our local air district to fight smog. That can ease the suffering for the one in three Valley families already grappling with some form of respiratory ailment.

The Ports Investment Bill seeks to save some of the 3,700 lives that are lost every year in California due to pollution from ports and freight transportation. SB 974 is four years in the making and would provide more than \$300 million per year to clean up statewide port pollution and fix intersections where freight trains delay traffic. Some 270 people die prematurely each year in the Valley alone due to port and freight transportation pollution.

SB 974 is good for Valley businesses, especially agriculture exporters trying to ensure the timely delivery of perishables. Reducing congestion on highways and building grade separations at train crossings increases reliability and decreases delays. According to a study by Beacon Economics, the fee in SB 974 amounts roughly to one-tenth of a penny for each dollar of goods shipped by California exporters. That's a worthwhile investment given the exorbitant price tag we already pay for dirty air.

Understandably, the governor is upset about the budget and the polarized politics that stalled our Legislature for months. No one was happy with the budget mess, and no one wanted the governor to make good on his threats to veto bills out of frustration.

Now he must look at these bills on their merits. A modest fee on car registration will make a big difference for the Valley. A revenue stream to deal with port trucks and congestion at train crossings will benefit the Valley, as well as thousands of residents statewide who are literally dying from port pollution. Without these new revenue streams, existing money will be stretched so far that the Valley risks getting left out.

As the political floodwaters recede, and we assess the damage done by the budget conflict, we can immediately start to rebuild. The governor should sign AB 2522 and SB 974. They are the Valley's most important pieces of environmental legislation this year. By putting good policy over bad politics, we can make progress toward the governor's clean air goals; and that's good for all of California.

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