Why California’s new clean energy law matters for all of us

Across the country, elected officials and business leaders are setting more ambitious goals for renewable energy. California’s recent commitment to 60 percent renewable electricity by 2030 and 100 percent zero-carbon electricity by 2040 is, so far, the gold standard, and Environment California, part of our national network, spearheaded the effort. Here’s Rob Sargent, senior director of our 100% Renewable Energy campaign, on why this new law should inspire every state to aim higher.

How can you tell when an action to fight climate change is the real deal?

You can start by asking three questions: Does it help to get us off of fossil fuels quickly and completely? Does it fuel the development of the clean energy technologies and practices of tomorrow? And does it demonstrate leadership and commitment, inspiring others to follow?

It is rare that any single action checks all three of those boxes. But California’s adoption of Senate Bill 100 is just such an achievement.

An ambitious but necessary goal

Senate Bill 100 commits the state of California to obtaining 60 percent of its electricity from renewable sources, such as wind and solar power, by 2030. And it sets a goal of obtaining 100 percent of the state’s electricity from carbon-free sources by 2045.

In a little more than a generation, the world’s fifth-largest economy will obtain its electricity without the carbon pollution that threatens the future of our planet. That is a big deal.

And it isn’t an exercise in wishful thinking. California has a sterling record of setting seemingly ambitious targets for cleaning up its electricity system—and then beating them. Four times since 2002, California has set renewable energy targets. And all four times, the Golden State has put itself on track to exceed those goals.

Fifteen years ago, for example, California pledged to draw 20 percent of its electricity from renewable sources like wind and solar by 2017. California smashed that goal, getting nearly a third of its electricity from renewable sources last year.

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Wrong way for the climate: 350,000 oppose rollback of Clean Cars Standards

Given the alarming ways our climate is changing, doesn’t it make sense for automakers to focus on making cars that pollute far less, if at all?

On Oct. 26, Environment America Research & Policy Center and our national network showed the Trump administration that 350,000 Americans think so. Together with our coalition partners, we delivered that many public comments to the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Highway Safety Transportation Administration opposing plans to roll back federal Clean Cars Standards. Transportation is already our No. 1 source of climate-altering pollution. By freezing the standards at 2020 levels, the plan would lock in more dirty air and global warming pollution.

“With the latest research telling us we need to swiftly and significantly slash global warming emissions, we need to move forward, not pull a U-turn,” said Andrea McGimsey, senior director of our national network’s Global Warming Solutions campaign.

We’re also calling on state leaders to promote zero-emission electric vehicles.

Solar mayors coalition reaches 200 members

More and more American cities are leading the way toward a cleaner, greener future powered by the sun.

On Nov. 13, Environment America Research & Policy Center announced that 216 mayors have signed on to our “Mayors for Solar Energy” call to action. The list includes leaders from both major parties and all 50 states. And they aren’t limited to the sunnier parts of the country: Mayors like James Brainard of Carmel, Indiana, and Jacob Frey of Minneapolis say improvements in solar panel efficiency and energy storage have made solar a viable option for their cities.

“While our federal government is promoting 19th-century energy policies, mayors across the country are rising to the challenge,” said Emma Searson, an advocate with our national network’s Go Solar campaign.

The Mayors for Solar Energy project goes beyond the letter itself, producing resources and hosting trainings to help cities adopt more renewable energy.

Logging roadless forests is so 19th century. New bill calls for 21st century protections.

If it’s wild, we should keep it that way. That’s the sentiment behind a bill introduced Aug. 1 by Sen. Maria Cantwell (Wash.) to permanently protect our national forests from logging. For nearly 20 years, the Roadless Rule has safeguarded certain federal lands from roadbuilding and the development that follows, and Environment America staff were instrumental in building the necessary public support for it. But the Trump administration’s decisions to allow mining and drilling on public lands give conservationists good reason to worry about its future.

“The administration continues to try to solve 21st-century problems with 19th-century thinking, trying to extract a relatively small amount from our few remaining natural areas,” said Sen. Cantwell in a statement.

Sponsored by 16 senators, Sen. Cantwell’s bill would enshrine the Roadless Rule in law and offer permanent protections to 58.5 million acres of wilderness. Environment America is calling on our senators to support it.

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A boost for clean energy innovation

To hit the goal of 100 percent clean energy, California is going to need to develop and implement the clean energy technologies of tomorrow. The passage of SB 100 will help achieve that.

California's history of strong clean energy policies has made the Golden State a global center of clean energy innovation. The state currently attracts more than half (57 percent) of all clean energy venture capital investment in the U.S., and generates nearly three times as many patents for clean energy technology as the next leading state. By setting an ambitious goal for clean electricity, SB 100 represents an all-points bulletin to clean energy innovators and entrepreneurs, making it far more likely that the clean energy technologies of tomorrow will be developed and tested in California.

A powerful example

By committing to 100 percent clean electricity, California is pushing all of its chips to the center of the table in a big bet on clean energy. Visionaries, experts and political leaders have talked for years about what a zero-carbon electricity system might look like and whether it is even possible. California’s message to them is as follows: “Watch us. Let us show you how it’s done.”

California’s ambition and confidence will surely make an impression on leaders in the many states already taking action on climate—and even some that aren’t yet. California’s bold action will shift the conversation as to what is technologically, economically and politically possible.

It will also change the global conversation. California’s action sends a message to Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron, Xi Jinping and other world leaders that America’s progress toward clean energy will continue—Donald Trump or no Donald Trump. If the federal government won’t lead, states will.

At a time when much of the news about climate change is bad, California’s bold, new clean energy commitment is a breath of fresh air. And it could be a critical turning point in the fight against global warming.

By Rob Sargent, senior director, Campaign for 100% Renewable Energy

Originally posted at: www.medium.com/environmentamerica

You care about clean air and water, a healthy climate, and all the places that make America beautiful—and so do I. That’s why I’m proud to share with you some of the things we accomplished together in the closing months of 2018.

Thank you for making all this work possible with your action and support.

Ed Johnson
President
Hundreds of thousands join the call to choose wildlife over waste

More than 300,000 of our members and supporters across the country have joined our call to cut down on single-use plastics.

“We’ve all seen the stories of dead whales with gobs of plastic in their guts, or the photo of a turtle with a straw jammed in its nose,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network’s conservation program. “Compassion and common sense tells us that we need to move away from our throwaway, use-it-once-and-then-it’s-garbage way of thinking, as soon as possible.”

As a new year begins, we’re working to keep that momentum going across America.