

Measure A256

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please carefully read the following description of a ballot measure that was written by a disinterested expert. Feel free to take notes or outline passages as you read.

This measure is quite long and may take you as long as 15 minutes to read.

BALLOT MEASURE A256

BACKGROUND

Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases. Greenhouse gases (GHGs) are gases that trap heat from the sun within the earth's atmosphere, thereby warming the earth's temperature. Both natural phenomena (mainly the evaporation of water) and human activities (principally burning fossil fuels) produce GHGs. Scientific experts have voiced concerns that higher concentrations of GHGs resulting from human activities are increasing global temperatures, and that such global temperature rises could eventually cause significant problems. Such global temperature increases are commonly referred to as global warming, or climate change.

As a populous state with a large industrial economy, California is the second largest emitter of GHGs in the United States and one of the largest emitters of GHGs in the world. Climate change is a global issue necessitating an international approach. Actions in California regarding GHGs have been advocated on the basis that they will contribute to a solution and may act as a catalyst to the undertaking of GHG mitigation policies elsewhere in our nation and in other countries.

Assembly Bill 32 Enacted to Limit GHGs. In 2006, the state enacted the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, commonly referred to as Assembly Bill 32 or "AB 32." This legislation established the target of reducing the state's emissions of GHGs by 2020 to the level that emissions were at in 1990. It is estimated that achieving this target would result in about a 30 percent reduction in GHGs in 2020 from where their level would otherwise be in the absence of AB 32.

Assembly Bill 32 requires the state Air Resources Board (ARB) to adopt rules and regulations to achieve this reduction. The law also directs ARB, in developing these rules and regulations, to take advantage of opportunities to improve air quality, thereby creating public health benefits from the state's GHG emission reduction activities.

Other Laws Would Reduce GHG Emissions. In addition to AB 32, a number of other state laws have been enacted by the Legislature that would reduce GHG emissions. In some cases, the main purpose of these other laws is specifically to reduce GHG emissions. For example, a 2002 law requires the ARB to adopt regulations to reduce GHG emissions from cars and smaller trucks. Other laws have authorized various energy efficiency programs that could have the effect of reducing GHG emissions, although this may not have been their principal purpose.

“Scoping Plan” to Reach GHG Emission Reduction Target. As required by AB 32, the ARB in December 2008 released its plan on how AB 32's GHG emission reduction target for 2020 would be met. The plan—referred to as the AB 32 Scoping Plan—encompasses a number of different types of measures to reduce GHG emissions. Some are measures authorized by AB 32, while others are authorized by separately enacted laws. Some of these measures have as their primary objective something other than reducing GHGs, such as reducing the state's dependency on fossil fuels.

The plan includes a mix of traditional regulatory measures and market-based measures. Traditional regulations, such as energy efficiency standards for buildings, would require individuals and businesses to take specific actions to reduce emissions. Market-based measures provide those subject to them greater flexibility in how to achieve GHG emission reductions. The major market-based measure included in the Scoping Plan is a “cap-and-trade” program. Under such a program, the ARB would set a limit, or cap, on GHG emissions; issue a limited number of emission allowances to emitters related to the amount of GHGs they emit; and allow emitters covered by the program to buy, sell, or trade those emission allowances.

Some measures in the Scoping Plan have already been adopted in the form of regulations. Other regulations are either currently under development or will be developed in the near future. Assembly Bill 32 requires that all regulations for GHG emission reduction measures be adopted by January 1, 2011, and in effect by January 1, 2012.

Fee Assessed to Cover State's Administrative Costs. As allowed under AB 32, the ARB has adopted a regulation to recover the state's costs of administering the GHG emission reduction programs. Beginning in fall 2010, entities that emit a high amount of GHGs, such as power plants and refineries, must pay annual fees that will be used to offset these administrative costs. Fee revenues will also be used to repay various state special funds that have made loans totaling \$83 million to the AB 32 program. These loans have staggered repayment dates that run through 2014.

The Economic Impact of Implementing the Scoping Plan. The implementation of the AB 32 Scoping Plan will reduce levels of GHG emissions and related air pollutants by imposing various new requirements and costs on certain businesses and individuals. The reduced emissions and the new costs will both affect the California economy. There is currently a significant ongoing debate about the impacts to the California economy from implementing the Scoping Plan. Economists, environmentalists, and policy makers have voiced differing views about how the Scoping Plan will affect the gross state product, personal income, prices, and jobs. The considerable uncertainty about the Scoping Plan's “bottom-line” or net impact on the economy is due to a number of reasons. First, because a number of the Scoping Plan measures have yet to be fully developed, the economic impacts will depend heavily on how the measures are designed in the public regulatory process. Second, because a number of the Scoping Plan measures are phased in over time, the full economic impacts of some measures would not be felt for several years. Third, the implementation of the Scoping Plan has the potential to create both positive and negative impacts on the economy. This includes the fact that there will be both “winners” and “losers” under the implementation of the Scoping Plan for particular economic sectors, businesses, and individuals.

A number of studies have considered the economic impacts of the Scoping Plan implementation in 2020—the year when AB 32's GHG emission reduction target is to be met. Those studies that have looked at the economic impacts from a relatively broad perspective have, for the most part, found that there will be some modest reduction in California's gross state product, a comprehensive measure of economic activity for the state. These findings reflect how such things as more expensive energy, new investment requirements, and costs of regulatory compliance combine to increase the costs of producing materials, goods, and services that consumers and businesses buy. Given all of the uncertainties involved, however, the net economic impact of the Scoping Plan remains a matter of debate.

PROPOSAL

This proposition suspends the implementation of AB 32 until the unemployment rate in California is 5.5 percent or less for four consecutive quarters. During the suspension period, state agencies are prohibited from proposing or adopting new regulations, or enforcing previously adopted regulations, that would implement AB 32. (Once AB 32 went back into effect, this measure could not suspend it again.)

IMPACTS OF THIS PROPOSITION ON CLIMATE CHANGE REGULATION

AB 32 Would Be Suspended, Likely for Many Years. Under this proposition, AB 32 would be suspended immediately. It would remain suspended until the state's unemployment rate was 5.5 percent or less for four consecutive quarters (a one-year period). We cannot estimate when the suspension of AB 32 might end. Figure 1 provides historical perspective on the state's unemployment rate. It shows that, since 1970, the state has had three periods (each about ten quarters long) when the unemployment rate was at or below 5.5 percent for four consecutive quarters or more. The unemployment rate in California for the first two quarters of 2010 was above 12 percent. Economic forecasts for the next five years have the state's unemployment rate remaining above 8 percent. Given these factors, it appears likely that AB 32 would remain suspended for many years.

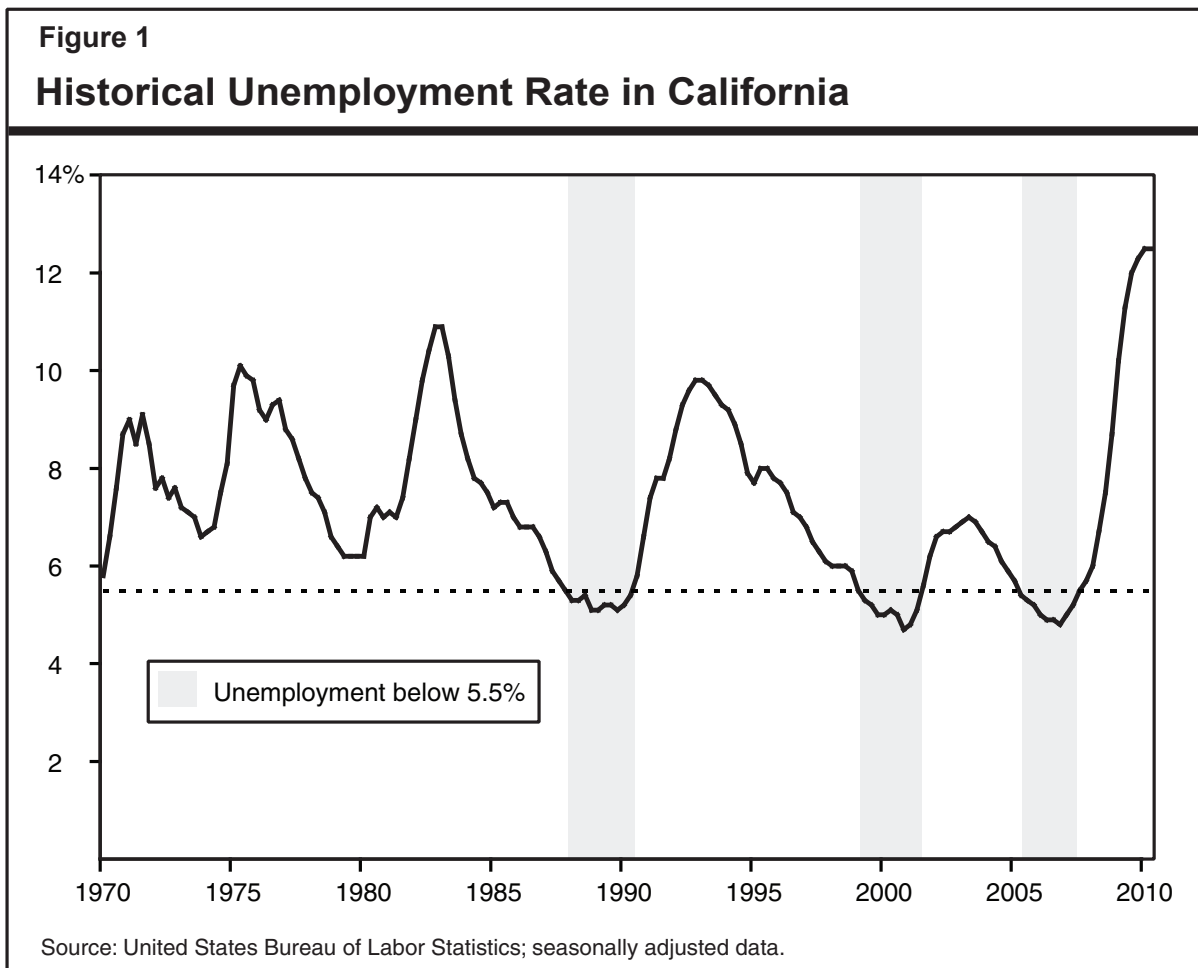
Various Climate Change Regulatory Activities Would Be Suspended. This proposition would result in the suspension of a number of measures in the Scoping Plan for which regulations either have been adopted or are proposed for adoption. Specifically, this proposition would likely suspend:

- The proposed cap-and-trade regulation discussed above.
- The “low carbon fuel standard” regulation that requires providers of transportation fuel in California (such as refiners and importers) to change the mix of fuels to lower GHG emissions.
- The proposed ARB regulation that is intended to require privately and publicly owned utilities and others who sell electricity to obtain at least 33 percent of their supply from “renewable” sources, such as solar or wind power, by 2020. (The current requirement that 20 percent of the electricity obtained by privately owned utilities come from renewable sources by 2010 would not be suspended by this proposition.)
- The fee to recover state agency costs of administering AB 32.

Much Regulation in the Scoping Plan Would Likely Continue. Many current activities related to addressing climate change and reducing GHG emissions would probably not be suspended by this proposition. That is because certain Scoping Plan regulations implement laws other than AB 32. The regulations that would likely move forward, for example, include:

- New vehicle emission standards for cars and smaller trucks.
- A program to encourage homeowners to install solar panels on their roofs.
- Land-use policies to promote less reliance on vehicle use.
- Building and appliance energy efficiency requirements.

We estimate that more than one-half of the emission reductions from implementing the Scoping Plan would come because of laws enacted separately from AB 32.





STOP!

Please go to the online survey, enter the 4-character code for this ballot measure (printed at the top and bottom of this page) and answer the survey questions.