
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Senator Allen, Chair

2021 - 2022 Regular

Bill No: SCR 53
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Urgency: No
Consultant: Eric Walters

Hearing Date: 1/10/22
Fiscal: No

SUBJECT: Climate change

DIGEST: This resolution would declare that a climate emergency threatens the state, the nation, the planet, the natural world, and all of humanity.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Under the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (Health and Safety Code (HSC) §38500 et seq.):
 - a) Establishes the Air Resources Board (ARB) as the state agency responsible for monitoring and regulating sources emitting greenhouse gases (GHGs).
 - b) Requires ARB to approve a statewide GHG emissions limit equivalent to the statewide GHG emissions level in 1990 to be achieved by 2020 (AB 32, 2006) and to ensure that statewide GHG emissions are reduced to at least 40% below the 1990 level by 2030. (SB 32, 2015)
 - c) Requires ARB to prepare and approve a scoping plan for achieving the maximum technologically feasible and cost-effective reductions in GHG emissions and to update the scoping plan at least once every 5 years.
 - d) Requires ARB when adopting regulations, to the extent feasible and in furtherance of achieving the statewide GHG emissions goal, to do the following:
 - i) Ensure that activities undertaken to comply with the regulations do not disproportionately impact low-income communities.
 - ii) Ensure that activities pursuant to the regulations do not interfere with efforts to achieve and maintain federal and state ambient air quality standards and to reduce toxic air contaminant emissions.

- iii) Consider overall societal benefits, including reductions in other air pollutants, diversification of energy sources, and other benefits to the economy, environment, and public health.
- iv) Consider cost-effectiveness of these regulations.

This resolution:

- 1) States that California has proven to be a leader in adopting policies to address climate change.
- 2) Acknowledges that the consequences of climate change are causing multiple crises across the globe.
- 3) Recognizes that 97% of scientists agree that climate change is human induced and warn that the planet's warming should not exceed 1.5 °C.
- 4) Finds that the United States has rejoined the Paris Agreement and global emissions must begin to fall by 7.6% each year beginning in 2020 in order to meet the most ambitious goals of the Paris Agreement.
- 5) Finds that climate change will cause sea level rise, ocean acidification and warming, impact human health, disproportionately impact marginalized communities, all of which have impacts across California and across the globe.
- 6) Recognizes that California has been profoundly impacted by several natural disasters, made worse by climate change, and the state has already warmed by 3 °F over the past century, which has led to a hotter and drier climate that exacerbates wildfires.
- 7) Finds that 40 cities and counties in California have already declared climate emergencies as well as many governments and universities globally.
- 8) States that California has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to protect human health in the face of a crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, and must apply those lessons to protect communities from climate change.
- 9) Declares that the State of California must commit to ensuring that its actions remain in alignment with the most current science regarding climate change and do everything in its power to encourage swift conversion to an ecologically, socially, and financially stable economy.

- 10) Resolves that the California State Legislature declare that the climate emergency threatens the state, the nation, the planet, the natural world, and all of humanity.

Background

- 1) *The climate crisis in California.* California is particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of climate change, including an increase in extreme heat events, drought, wildfire, sea level rise, and more. According to the Fourth California Climate Change Assessment, by 2100, the average annual maximum daily temperature is projected to increase by 5.6-8.8 °F, water supply from snowpack is projected to decline by two-thirds, the average area burned in wildfires could increase by 77%, and 31-67% of Southern California beaches may completely erode without large-scale human intervention, all under business as usual and moderate GHG reduction pathways.

California is already experiencing the effects of climate change now. For example, eight out of the past ten years have had significantly below average precipitation. As of September 2020, the state has experienced a degree of wildfire activity that California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment initially forecasted to not occur until 2050. We can expect effects such as these as well as extreme weather events to increase over time until global GHG emissions are significantly reduced.

- 2) *The scientific consensus on climate change.* Over 40 years ago in 1979, scientists from 50 nations met at the First World Climate Conference in Geneva and agreed that climate change was an alarming concern that necessitated urgent action. Since then, through many more global assemblies and meetings, scientists have continued to warn of insufficient progress towards mitigating global climate change. In a study published November 2019 in the journal *Bioscience*, more than 11,000 scientists from around the world declared that the planet "clearly and unequivocally faces a climate emergency." The article also laid out six broad policy goals that must be met to address climate change, including decarbonizing the energy sector, reducing short-lived climate pollutants, protecting and restoring natural ecosystems, changing the food system to be more plant-based and sustainable, and decoupling the global economy from excessive extraction and overexploitation of ecosystems.

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an intergovernmental body of the United Nations formed in 1988, is often seen as the leading international body of scientists on climate change. Since their landmark Fifth Assessment Report in 2014 declaring that, to ensure that the most harmful impacts of

climate change are avoided, global warming should not surpass 2 °C, their recommendations have only become more urgent. In 2018, they released a special report stating that warming should actually not surpass 1.5 °C. On August 9th, the first installment of the Sixth Assessment Report on Climate Change was released. This report states that scientists are currently observing climate change in motion, with changes in the Earth's climate measured in every region across the whole climate system. This has and will continue to lead to an increase in extreme weather events and irreversible changes to ecosystems and local environments that will continue to wreak havoc for humans over the next several decades. It also warns that the chances of limiting warming to 1.5-2 °C are slipping out of reach without drastic and immediate global action to transition away from fossil fuels and reduce GHG emissions to zero by around 2050.

- 3) *Global climate goals and progress.* In 2015, The Paris Climate Agreement, an international treaty on climate change, was adopted and signed by 195 nations. The goal of the agreement is to keep the rise in mean global temperatures below 2 °C above preindustrial levels, and preferably below 1.5 °C in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Emissions should be reduced as soon as possible and reach net-zero in the second half of the 21st century. Under the agreement, each country must determine, plan, and regularly report on its contributions.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) releases an annual Emissions Gap Report to provide an update on global progress towards reducing emissions and updated targets to avoid the worst effects of climate change if 1.5 °C is exceeded. In their 2020 report, they make several recommendations for global climate policy to ensure a safe climate future for all. The consensus is that, globally, we are currently not on track to reduce emissions in a timely manner. Under current unconditional commitments from the Paris Agreement, temperatures are expected to rise by 3.2 °C. The report warns that unless global GHG emissions fall by 7.6% each year between 2020 and 2030, the world will miss the opportunity to get on track towards the 1.5 °C temperature goal of the Paris Agreement. The global level of ambition for GHG emissions reductions must be roughly tripled for a 2 °C pathway and increased at least fivefold for the 1.5 °C pathway. The United States is identified as one of the countries not on track to meet their current, and insufficient, nationally determined contribution (NDC).

The report also highlights that the growing number of countries committing to net-zero emissions goals by mid-century is the most significant climate policy development of 2020. To remain feasible and credible, these commitments

must urgently be translated into strong near-term policies and actions and reflected in NDCs.

The COVID-19 recovery is identified as a vital turning point towards reducing emissions. A green pandemic recovery that accelerates a low-carbon transition could cut up to 25% off the emissions we would expect to see in 2030 compared to the trajectory of emissions based on policies in place prior to COVID-19.

- 4) *The cost of climate change.* Climate change comes with a huge price tag for every government, and California is no exception. The increasing intensity and frequency of the consequences of climate change will continue to burden budgets. California's 2018 wildfires, less than half the size of the 2020 conflagrations, cost \$148.5 billion in damages (about two thirds of California's pre-COVID 2020 state budget), with \$27.7 billion (19%) in capital losses, \$32.2 billion (22%) in health costs and \$88.6 billion (59%) in indirect losses with a majority of those far from the actual wildfire footprint. The cost of water and energy is predicted to increase significantly as well, especially in the Western United States. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) estimates that under a business-as-usual scenario, between the years 2025 and 2100, the cost of providing water to the western states in the US will increase from \$200 billion to \$950 billion per year, nearly an estimated 1% of the United States' gross domestic product.

There is a greater human cost to climate change as well. In addition to capital losses, increased cost of resources, and health costs, the impacts of climate change on mental health, food security, displacement and migration, and more are just coming into the conversation and are still difficult to quantify.

Of course, taking action to mitigate climate change damages—by reducing emissions, protecting vulnerable communities and assets, and limiting warming—will be costly as well. However, it is important that those costs be compared to the monumental costs of inaction leading to increased warming, more frequent and intense disasters, and greater human health impacts.

- 5) *Climate change and equity.* The effects of climate change to date have been felt the world over, but the most dire consequences have often struck those least able to defend themselves. This is true both in California and worldwide. Should reaching net zero GHG emissions be delayed and rapid warming allowed to continue, experts predict unprecedented numbers of deaths, ecosystem destruction, and human migration. In a 2019 report on climate change and poverty, the United Nations Human Rights Council states,

“Addressing climate change will require a fundamental shift in the global economy, decoupling improvements in economic well-being from fossil fuel emissions... An over-reliance on the private sector could lead to a climate apartheid scenario in which the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger, and conflict, while the rest of the world is left to suffer.”

Climate change poses the greatest threat to those least responsible for it, including low-income and disadvantaged populations, women, racial minorities, marginalized ethnic groups, and the elderly. When equity is taken into account for GHG emissions reductions, “the combined emissions of the richest one per cent of the global population account for more than twice the poorest 50 per cent. The elite will need to reduce their footprint by a factor of at least 30 to stay in line with the Paris Agreement targets,” according to the UNEP 2020 Emissions Gap Report.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of Bill.* According to the author, “Experts believe climate change has made California - and the American West - warmer and drier over the last 30 years. Extreme heat is now the top weather-related killer in the US. Western states are more susceptible to extreme drought and larger, more destructive and more frequent wildfires. Our coastal communities are already experiencing early challenges with sea level rise. California’s climate has always been variable, but the last couple of decades have been some of the hottest on record here in the Golden State. We know that this crisis is evolving faster than anticipated and communities big and small are starting to witness its damaging impacts.

“Just last year, the legislature approved over \$15 billion in funding to tackle the growing wildfire crisis in this state. We’ll be investing in drought response and resiliency, helping communities prepare for extreme heat and sea level rise, advancing more sustainable agriculture practices. This is truly a nation-leading climate agenda. And while we Californians have historically led this nation on emission reduction efforts, now more than ever, we must redouble our focus to combat this growing crisis.”

- 2) *What’s in an emergency?* SCR 53 declares that, “the climate emergency threatens the state, the nation, the planet, the natural world, and all of humanity.” Given the concordance of such a wide body of scientific evidence supporting this fact, there is little doubt this is true.

However, the term “climate emergency” does not appear in California statute

and merits further consideration. In the 1970 California Emergency Services Act, three conditions or degrees of emergency were established. In particular, a “state of emergency” is, in part, defined as “conditions of disaster or of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the state caused by conditions such as air pollution, fire, flood, storm, epidemic, riot, drought, cyberterrorism, sudden and severe energy shortage, plant or animal infestation or disease.” Most of these conditions have worsened (or are expected to) considerably because of increasing global climate change. Therefore, the use of phrase “climate emergency” appears justified.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 1395 (Muratsuchi, 2021) would have declared that it is the policy of the state to achieve net zero GHG emissions and reduce anthropogenic GHG emissions by at least 90% below the 1990 level no later than 2045, and to achieve and maintain net negative GHG emissions thereafter. AB 1395 is on the Senate inactive file.

SB 582 (Stern, 2021) would, amongst other things, update the statewide GHG emission reduction target to be up to 80 percent by 2030 and require the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal EPA), and ARB to develop a Climate Restoration Plan that specifies carbon removal targets before 2035. SB 582 is on the Senate inactive file.

SOURCE: Author

SUPPORT:

350 Humboldt
350 Silicon Valley
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OPPOSITION:

None received

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