Collaborative approach needed after failure of fuel-reduction mandate

BY CATHERINE REHEIS-BOYD
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Pundits proclaimed that the petroleum industry was the big winner coming out of the most recent legislative session. But the real winners were the millions of Californians who believe we can protect the environment without sacrificing our economy and middle class.

The fuel-reduction mandate in Senate Bill 350 would have restricted the use of gasoline and diesel fuel in California by 50 percent over the next 15 years. Although it was defeated, the debate illustrated how some in Sacramento are...
willing to ignore the legitimate energy needs of working families for an ill-conceived plan foisted upon the public by a Silicon Valley billionaire and politicians who neglect the daily challenges that most Californians experience.

Legislators who refused to support the fuel restrictions represent poor and working-class districts throughout the state. In their districts, many people commute long distances to work. They drive older cars, get by month to month,
and their household spending is directly dependent upon the price and availability of gasoline.

Thus, the Assembly’s rebuke of those arbitrary restrictions indicated that today’s Legislature wants to address energy and climate policy in a much more thoughtful manner, with an appreciation of real-world consequences.

The push for a 50 percent fuel restriction was born from a slogan advanced by politically ambitious billionaire Tom Steyer. Although his battle cry was politically potent, there was no legitimate science behind it. That’s why Steyer and his allies were never able to explain how such a goal could be achieved without bringing California families and businesses to a halt, literally.

California already has the most progressive carbon-reduction program in the United States. Why not collaboratively work to make sure the existing program is implemented well, instead of chasing empty policies that cannot be explained?

Certainly, creating a wedge issue to bash the gasoline, transportation and manufacturing industries is politically convenient. But the very people whom SB 350’s proponents claimed to be helping would be hurt first and most.

Fortunately for California, the other winner in the SB 350 debate was representative government. A bipartisan chorus of legislators sang loudly that they are not willing to abdicate authority and allow the unelected Air Resources
Board to make fundamental decisions about access to energy.

Most media analysts missed the war being waged between the peoples’ representatives and those regulators who, once appointed, are well beyond the vox populi. But in this battle, the voice of the people was heard.

Legislators with double-digit unemployment in their districts asked how fuel restrictions would impact the families they represent. Their questions were not answered. Rural legislators asked why their districts continually bear greater environmental burdens than wealthier communities. They were not answered. Legislators, the public and the media asked how those fuel restrictions would be implemented. There were no answers.

Understandably, without legitimate answers to the most basic questions, the Assembly refused to give a blank check to the Air Resources Board.

As for the petroleum industry, we stand ready, as always, to participate in thoughtful and collaborative efforts. The cleanest fuels in the world power California’s 27 million cars and trucks. Not only are energy producers and refiners on target to meet 1990 greenhouse gas emissions levels, we continue to provide a product that enables our standard of living and powers our economy.

Rather than demonizing the petroleum industry in an effort to advance reckless policies and short-sighted political agendas, we hope the
takeaway for SB 350’s proponents is the reality that Californians will be better served by a more collaborative approach to our energy and climate future.

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Political Scientist David Easton defines "politics" as "the authoritative allocation of values for society." HOW the parties to the political process practice "politics" is its own choice. The unconscious competence of most is the practice of "power politics" or the win/lose/zero sum game paradigm. This is well described in the Op-Ed piece here.

In order to even be consciously incompetent at the practice of a collaborative approach to "politics" requires of the parties to any issue a commitment to training, professional facilitation, practice, and patience. Too many hearing the word "collaborative" think that they know what it looks like, or in the words of Rodney King "...just get along."

The collaborative or positive sum game model seeks to achieve an elegant solution that meets both the mutual and separate needs of the parties by actually building consensus. Such an initiative requires of the parties a commitment of time, money, patience, and a willingness to be trained and facilitated by well practiced professionals. Accordingly, few are willing to venture beyond the admonition to "be collaborative". Those who make this choice are typically well pleased with the outcome, and seek the utilization of the approach in all endeavors requiring the "allocation of values" (aka assets).
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