

Headline: California budget's climate-change proviso called historic

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- Bill guarantees 25 percent of emissions cap-and-trade earnings are invested in low-income communities
- Budget will change climate-change conversation, advocates say

SACRAMENTO, California – A coalition of supporters hailed the state budget, Senate Bill 535, which is headed for final passage, for guaranteeing that at least 25 percent of funds raised by the state's carbon auctions would go to investments benefitting economically disadvantaged and highly polluted communities.

Although final details were not yet advocates say the framework approved by the legislative conference committee makes the right choices and must not be weakened in any last-minute maneuvering.

"The real winners through this budget process are low- income communities of color and working Californians," said Mari Rose Taruc, state organizing director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network.

"Through Senator Kevin de Leon's leadership on SB 535, the neighborhoods that need it most will see renewable energy, transit and affordable housing investments," Taruc added.

The conference committee deal funds programs that clean the air while promoting economic opportunity and equity. It commits 15 percent of cap-and-trade revenue to transportation projects, such as increasing the frequency of buses and improving intercity rail, and 20 percent to affordable housing near transit and other programs that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Another 40 percent will fund various transportation, natural resources and energy programs.

"Thanks to this budget and the investments created by SB 535, California has changed the conversation on climate policy," said Vien Truong, environmental equity director of The Greenlining Institute.

"We don't have to choose between jobs in our communities on one hand or cleaning the air and fighting global warming on the other. California is proving that good environmental policies boost our economy and help consumers," Truong said.

Recent studies show that together, these investments in transportation and affordable housing would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by boosting transit ridership.

Cars account for as much as 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in some parts of California, and low-income residents who live near transit are more likely to give up their cars and reduce driving than higher-income residents who also live near transit.

"This budget recognizes that by improving transit service, housing opportunities and health outcomes for low-income families, we reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create a healthier environment for everyone," said Marybelle Nzegwu, staff attorney at Public Advocates Inc.

“California’s most disadvantaged communities will finally receive some resources to reduce pollution, improve services, and cut costs related to transportation and energy,” said said Bill Magavern, Policy Director for Coalition for Clean Air.

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“We thank the legislature and governor for funding all of the top priorities identified by our community outreach,” Magavern added.