

Jerry Brown Faces Off with Big Auto

California Attorney General continues lawsuit against big 6 car manufacturers

Daniel Zarchy
National News Reporter

In another political two-punch combo to potential polluters, California Attorney General Jerry Brown announced that he would continue his predecessor's crusade against auto companies just hours before the news broke from Paris that global warming was "very likely" caused by humans.

Edmund "Jerry" Brown Jr., former governor of California and newly inaugurated California attorney general, announced Thursday that he will continue suing the six major auto companies for damages incurred by vehicle emissions, a project initiated by Bill Lockyer, former attorney general and current state treasurer.

Brown, in a general letter to automakers, invited the CEOs of General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, and the American outlets of Toyota, Nissan, and Honda to a formal gathering "at any suitable time or location," explaining that "with the current public, state, and Congressional focus on global warming and possible solutions, this is the right time for the state and the automakers to find cooperative approaches and resolve litigation in a constructive manner."

Gareth Lacy, deputy director of communications for the California

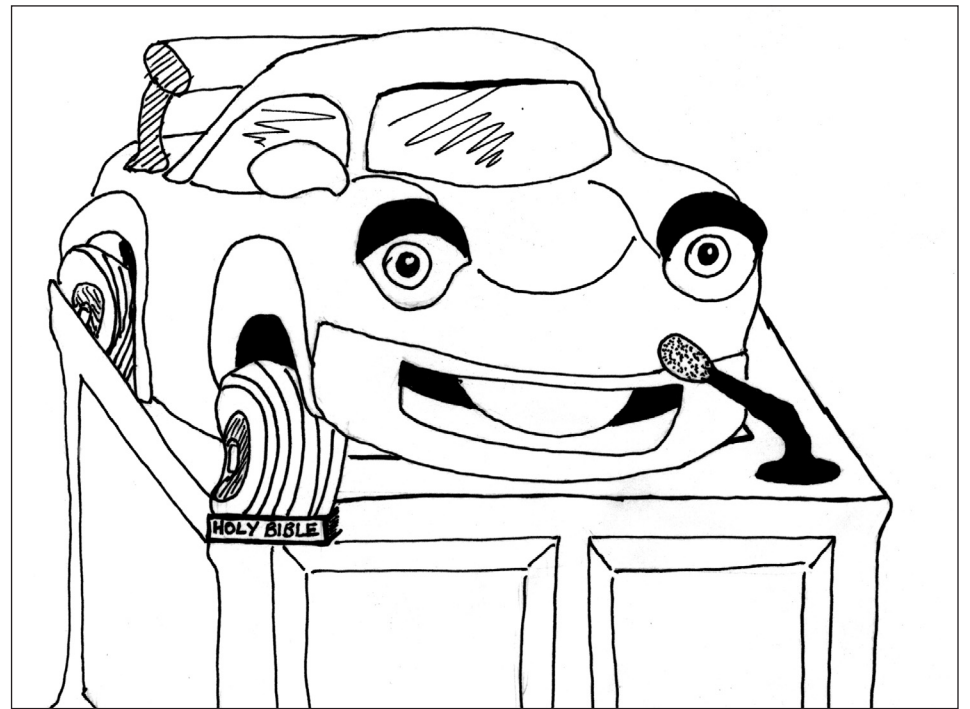
Department of Justice, explained that this move to continue the lawsuit was a necessary action to make the auto companies prepare for the future.

"We're looking at a burgeoning population of six billion people. We're looking at between a billion and two billion cars worldwide in the next 50 years," Lacy said. "That's astronomical. Every gallon of gas we burn is 19.8 pounds of carbon dioxide into our atmosphere and contributing to global warming."

Tom Dresslar, communications director for Bill Lockyer, explained that they had faced trouble from auto companies in the past, and that the companies should be forced to pay for their actions.

"They've fought us in court on other air emissions cases. They fight against strong fuel economy standards," Dresslar said. "They talk about us, the state, filing frivolous lawsuits. For one, [the case against the auto companies] is not a frivolous lawsuit; it's well-founded and long-standing in common law that when you create a public nuisance you can be sued for the nuisance that you are creating. The emissions from their products are the largest single contributor to the public nuisance of global warming in the state."

Chris Paine, writer and director of "Who Killed the Electric Car?," a 2006



Dylan Murphy | CHP

documentary that largely accused car manufacturers of deliberately and underhandedly eliminating demand for electric cars, feels that the government should stand up to the car companies.

"The industry complains about lawsuits, but they sued California on zero-emission vehicle standards, and they sued California on lots of other issues," Paine said, "If they say that lawsuits don't solve problems, why

are they resorting to them? If Congress and the state had passed tougher regulations to begin with, and the car companies hadn't worked so hard to stop them, we'd all be in a better place, including the carmakers."

Dresslar agreed, saying, "They want to be able to sue our asses every time we do something to deal with global warming, but every time we try to hold them accountable, they whine."

Minimum Wage, Maximum Debate

Democratic Senate passes national wage bill, receives mixed response from GOP

Sophia Kirschenman
National News Reporter

A majority of the U.S. Senate voted last Thursday, Feb. 1, to increase the federal minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25 an hour.

The move represents bipartisan efforts in the new Democratic Congress and the first national wage-hike in over a decade. If President Bush signs the legislation into law, workers will see the increase gradually over the next two years. The bill also includes tax cuts for small businesses and tax increases for many executives—provisions latched on by Senate Republicans.

But despite the apparent compromises in Congress, minimum wage remains a highly debated topic. While some say minimum wage regulation is beneficial for members of the lower class, others argue the problem is not that people are underpaid, but that they lack the necessary skills to qualify for higher-income jobs.

Samuel DeCanio, a politics lecturer at UC Santa Cruz, believes that while minimum wage increases are intended to help the impoverished, they in fact have devastating effects.

"In general, minimum wage hikes are among the most counterproductive policies that are used to try to combat poverty," DeCanio said. "Considerable research has documented that minimum wage regulations actually increase levels of unemployment."

DeCanio also highlighted that unemployment among African-Americans and other minorities tends to increase as minimum wage rates are boosted.

"No one likes to hear this argument," DeCanio said. "It makes counterintuitive claims that suggest well-intentioned people can actually wind up hurting the individuals that they are trying to help. But just because a theory is counterintuitive doesn't mean it isn't correct."

While DeCanio believes that minimum wage boosts are unnecessary and detrimental, others, like Ryan Coonerty, legal studies lecturer at UCSC, believe that minimum wage increases are a vital to working-class Americans.

"A minimum wage is important," Coonerty said. "If people are working 40 hours a week, they deserve to be able to help their families and have a roof over their heads—an increase in the minimum

wage doesn't guarantee that will happen, but it helps."

Coonerty, whose family owns Bookshop Santa Cruz on Pacific Avenue, added that their business strives to provide a living wage for its employees.

"We have always paid higher than the minimum wage and will continue to do so," Coonerty said.

The parallel minimum wage bill that went before the House of Representatives on Jan. 10 did not include the extensive tax agenda added in the Senate. But once the bill was sent across the Capitol—where the Democrats hold the majority position by a much smaller margin—compromise was necessary in order to create bi-partisan legislation.

Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) seemed to believe that it is mostly Republicans who do not support the increase.

"It's always baffling to me what Republicans have against hard-working Americans," he said in a speech last week.

Senators had difficulty coming to an agreement, and their debate lasted nine days while a total of 111 amendments were made to the bill. Members of both

parties of Congress must reconcile their differences if they hope to pass legislation increasing national minimum wage. If passed, this will be among the first victories for the Democrats since they took control of Congress.

Ron Matuszak, a fourth-year student majoring in health science at UCSC who works at the Student Union on campus, believes that in states where the cost of living is higher, the national minimum wage does not provide an adequate living wage for those workers.

"In California, it would be hard to live off [\$5.15 an hour]," Matuszak said. "It wouldn't be very comfortable, but I don't think I'd be dying on the street. If you wanted to go out to a steak dinner three nights a week it probably wouldn't happen."

However, he said, he does see both sides of the issue.

"I don't agree with giving people really crummy wages, but I don't think we should make [employers] pay more."

Regardless of national law or public opinion, 29 states, including California, will raise their minimum wages to \$8.00 per hour by next January.