

Mary Nichols, Introduction to 50th Anniversary meeting of the California Air Resources Board, February 8, 2018.

Today, is February 8th. February 8th 1968, exactly 50 years ago, the Air Resources Board met for the first time in the midst of many more newsworthy events. The Tet Offensive was going on, there was rising opposition to the war in Vietnam, student protests were going on at Berkeley. I was actually there at the time. There was a violent police response.

The Mulford Carrel Act, which had been signed by Governor Reagan on August 30th of 1967, was a pioneering effort three years before the federal Clean Air Act to regulate air pollution using technology-forcing standards. Smog, in those days, hid the mountains that framed the Los Angeles Basin most of the time. It was also a health hazard. The air was a hazy acid yellow, and it literally hurt to breathe. L.A.'s bad air made the cover of Time magazine that year.

The new Board combined the former Motor Vehicle Pollution Control Board, and the Department of Health's Bureau of Air Sanitation. In 1968, there were 53 employees. Some of them worked in Berkeley where the Health Department was headquartered that was -- others were in Los Angeles, where the original vehicle laboratory was located, and a handful of staff were here in Sacramento where the new headquarters was -- as it was established as it happened during that very first Board meeting.

The office moved from one location to another over the years. At one point, it was in a former furniture showroom at K and 13th where the convention center is now, and the Board never had a hearing room of its own.

That first meeting was held in Assembly room 127 at the Department of Agriculture Building on N Street across from the Capitol It's still there. Records indicated that about 40 people attended with 13 of the original 14 Board members present.

A lot has happened over the ensuing five decades since that first meeting. And as we'll be seeing in a few moments, we have slashed smog-forming pollution and toxic fine particle pollution. Cars are more than 99 percent cleaner than cars were when we began in the 1970s, and certainly cleaner than in the 1960s. Modern diesel trucks are more than 90 percent cleaner than the older dirtier models with no emissions controls like they used to have. And yet, I find it strange that we're still at a point where the issues that we're grappling with today, that resonate today, are the same issues that we were dealing with during that first meeting 50 years ago.

The first issue before the new Board was setting tough new vehicle standards that cars would have to meet. Those early standards focused on hydrocarbons, that is, unburned gasoline - we now call them VOCs - that escaped out the tailpipe. And even though it

was 50 years ago, it's also interesting to note that the representatives of General Motors who testified at that meeting said that the automobile industry could not possibly meet the absolute tailpipe limit of 180 parts per million of hydrocarbon for every vehicle that they produced. He claimed that it was simply beyond the industry's technological capability.

Of course, by the end of the next decade, thanks to technological breakthroughs, and manufacturing breakthroughs -- we particularly have to take note of the three-way catalytic converter and other improvements -- cars were meeting and beating much tougher emissions standards. Today, the limit of permitted hydrocarbons is well under 1/100th of that earlier so-called "impossible to meet" standard.

The next big struggle was over an issue that sounds even more familiar: the need for a waiver of federal preemption for the California standards. This related to the National Air Quality Act that had just been signed into law by President Johnson in November 1967. There was a lot of discussion at that time about California's role and whether California ought to be allowed to set standards that were stricter than the proposed federal standards.

In 1968, I'm happy to report that all factions in California politics supported California's need to set its own standards. More than 10 witnesses had testified about that issue in January of 1968 before a hearing of the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare meeting in San Francisco just three weeks before the Board's first meeting -- the meeting that we celebrate Today -- two years before EPA had even been created. Those who spoke up for California included the State's senior Senator George Murphy. Murphy, a Republican, was a former actor, dancer, and President of the Screen Actors Guild setting the stage for at least two other actors to enter and play a significant role in California politics.

He served a single term in the U.S. Senate. And in that hearing in San Francisco, he declared that the other 49 states would actually benefit by California's ability to set its own standards, because, and I quote, "California has passed the point in its history when it can allow unrestrained fouling of its air. We cannot go backwards".

Also, present on this occasion was Spencer Williams, State Health and Welfare Administrator representing Governor Ronald Reagan. He noted that neither the current or the proposed federal standards were adequate to meet the compelling and extraordinary conditions of pollution in California. He said, "California still requires a regulatory program of its own to deal with the critical conditions of the state". And this was and remained the official position of the Reagan Administration.

Governor Reagan himself, one month before the Board's first meeting, specifically called on the advances in science and technology that he thought should be brought to

bear on pressing environmental problems. He said, "Many of the techniques which have been developed for living in space have immediate applications for a better life on earth. We must apply that research for the benefit of our people. I have already charged the reconstituted Boards on Air Resources and Water Quality to pursue this goal".

Well, Governor Reagan, we've come a long way. But despite major advances in automotive technology and the near vanishing of smog emergencies, we're still facing those same two fundamental issues: California's ability to set its own standards, and the need for even stricter limits on pollution from motor vehicles.

Later today, the Board will consider how California will deal with standards for trucks and trailers, if, as seems likely, the federal government withdraws or weakens those provisions. The current administrator of the U.S. EPA told Congress recently that he is still considering whether California should have the ability to set its own standards.

But while some issues never seem to die, we can take pride in a 50-year legacy of commitment to protect public health through science, research, a deep understanding of automobile technology, and an unwavering commitment by dozens of Board members over the decades to pass necessary, sensible, appropriate, and feasible regulations.

So I just want to take this opportunity in opening the meeting to extend our thanks to the many alumni, some of whom are with us today, and who helped bring us to the point where we are today, and to thank all of you here present for being with us on this important occasion.

And now, it's time to begin our business of the day, and proceed with the agenda before us.