

Robert Roy  
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# Program that cuts carbon dioxide threatened

National magazines in recent weeks have made Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger a cover-boy symbol for a worldwide battle against greenhouse gases and global warming.

He's traveled the globe, meeting with presidents, prime ministers, provincial governors and premiers to promote carbon emission exchanges and credits, all part of an effort to remove as much carbon dioxide and other warming gases from the atmosphere as possible.

All the while, here at home, he was trying to eliminate a 42-year-old program that removes at least 1.75 million tons of CO2 from the air every year at a relatively small cost to the state and no cost to businesses.

That program is called the Williamson Act, named for John Williamson, a 1960s-era Republican assemblyman from Kern County who devised a system of subsidizing farmers' property taxes if they pledge to keep their land in agriculture for periods of 10 or 20 years.

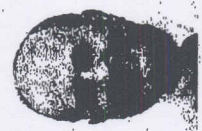
Cost to the state this year was projected at \$39 million to protect 16.5 million acres of farmland from development.

Did Schwarzenegger have any clue how much CO2 that land pulls from the air each year? Nope, says his press secretary.

"We don't have any kind of data on carbon

absorbed by Williamson Act land," press secretary Aaron McLearn said in an e-mail. "We're talking about farmland ... not forest land."

Then he added, probably being facetious, "On a good chunk of that ... land, animals are grazing — including cows, which we all know emit methane. So arguably, this would contribute to our global warming problem."



Thomas D. Elias

Well, the governor might not know how much carbon is absorbed by farmland, but others do. A Purdue University study early in this decade put the figure at an average of 0.107 tons per acre removed from the atmosphere. That was for all types of farmland, including grazing land, orchards, vineyards, rice fields, cotton fields and more. The math works out to a total of 1.765 million tons of carbon absorbed yearly by those 16.5 million Williamson Act acres. The figure accounted for cattle emissions and for pollution by farm machines.

Which does not include CO2 emissions avoided because that land has not been urbanized. And one late-1990s poll of farmers with land under Williamson Act contracts

indicated that at least one-third of them would have sold their land to developers by then if not for the state tax subsidy.

State legislators did not allow the money to be left out of the budget very long, reinstating the \$39 million just before Schwarzenegger met with new French President Nicolas Sarkozy to hype the fight against climate change. It remains to be seen whether Schwarzenegger will still blue-pencil the Williamson Act into oblivion after 42 years of usefulness via a line-item veto. He refuses to say what he'll do after legislators finally pass a new budget.

Plainly, the governor was sensitive to charges of hypocrisy when he submitted his budget plan sans the Williamson Act money, which amounted to a bare pittance compared with the \$103 billion total spending plan.

On the very page where he called for eliminating the subsidy, he cited a 2004 recommendation by the state legislative analyst calling for gradual elimination of the subsidy. Then he listed three other open-space preservation efforts he has supported, including setting up the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to protect 25 million acres of wildland.

The difference between that land and farmland protected by the Williamson Act is that the Sierra Nevada land is largely

unbuildable and would never be developed regardless of government intervention. But hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of farmland acres have already been built over.

Meanwhile, Schwarzenegger's agriculture secretary, A.G. Kawamura, wrote a letter to a newspaper insisting that ending the subsidy does not mean an end to the Williamson Act. "We are calling the counties and asking them to continue the program," he said.

But like Julia Berry, executive director of the Madera County Farm Bureau, other agriculture leaders call the putative cut a "de facto repeal of the Williamson Act." That's because almost no California county can afford to put millions of dollars into something the state has paid for from the start.

Which means that if Schwarzenegger insists on the cut, over the next 10 years, millions of acres will gradually become available to developers and cease to mitigate global warming. Instead, their new occupants will be producing greenhouse gases.

Which would be a most ironic legacy for a governor who styles himself the world leader in the fight against climate change.

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# Just spinning our wheels

Dalian and Doha exemplify green-revolution woes

**D**ALIAN, China — In the last few weeks, I happened to visit Doha and Dalian, and I must say: I was stunned.

Before explaining why, let me acknowledge that chances are you've not visited Doha or Dalian recently. Indeed, it may be — I presume nothing — that you have never heard of either city. Doha is the capital of Qatar, a tiny state east of Saudi Arabia. Dalian is in northeast China and is one of China's Silicon

**ESSAY** Valleys because of its proliferation of software parks and its dynamic, techie mayor, Xia Deren.

What was stunning is that I hadn't been to either city for more than three years, and I barely recognized either one.

In Doha, since I was last there, a skyline that looks like a mini-Manhattan has sprouted from the desert. Whatever construction cranes are not in China must be in Doha today. This once sleepy harbor now has a profile of skyscrapers, thanks to a huge injection of oil and gas revenues. Dalian, with 6 million people, already had a mini-Manhattan when I was last here. It seems to have grown two more since — including a gleaming new convention complex built on a man-made peninsula.

But this, alas, is not a travel column. It's an energy column.

If you want to know why I remain a climate skeptic — not a skeptic about climate change, but a skeptic that we're going to be able to mitigate it — it's partly because of Doha and Dalian. Can you imagine how much energy all these new skyscrapers in just two cities you've never heard of are going to consume and how much CO<sub>2</sub> they are going to emit?

I am not blaming them. It is a blessing that their people are growing out of poverty. And, after all, they're just following the high-energy growth model



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pioneered by America. We're still the world's biggest energy hogs, but we're now producing carbon copies in places you've never heard of.

Yes,

“Americans” are popping up all over now — people who once lived low-energy lifestyles but by dint of oil wealth or hard work are now moving into U.S.-style apartments, cars and appliances.

Our planet cannot tolerate so many “Americans,” unless we take the lead and change what it means to be an American in energy terms. Attention Kmart shoppers: The world consumed about 66.6 million barrels a day of oil in 1990. We're now consuming 83 million a day.

“Demand for oil has grown 22 percent in the U.S. since 1990. China's oil demand has grown nearly 200 percent in this same period,” Margo Oge, director of the Environmental Protection Agency's office of transportation and air quality, told the Tianjin China Green Car conference that I attended. “By 2030, the global thirst for oil is forecast to increase by another 40 percent if we maintain business as usual.”

Such an appetite would devour every incremental green initiative we make.

Hey, I'm really glad you switched to long-lasting compact fluorescent light bulbs in your house. But the growth in Doha and Dalian ate all your energy savings for breakfast.

I'm glad you bought a hybrid car. But Doha and Dalian devoured that before noon. I am glad that the U.S. Congress is debating whether to bring U.S. auto mileage requirements

up to European levels by 2020. Doha and Dalian will have those gains for lunch — maybe just the first course.

I'm glad that solar and wind power are “soaring” toward 2 percent of U.S. energy generation, but Doha and Dalian will devour all those gains for dinner. I am thrilled that you are now doing the “20 green things” suggested by your favorite American magazine. Doha and Dalian will snack on them all, like popcorn before bedtime.

But, as I said, this is not just about “them.” It is still very much about us. Peter Bakker is the chief executive of TNT, the biggest express delivery company in Europe. The Dow Jones Sustainability Index 2007 just listed TNT the No. 1 company in terms of energy and environmental practices. Bakker, whom I met in China, told me this story:

“We operate 35,000 trucks and 48 aircraft in Europe. We just bought two Boeing 747s, which, when fully operational, will do nine round trips every week between our home base in Liege (Belgium) and Shanghai. They leave Liege only partly full and every day fly back to Europe as full as you can stuff them with iPods and computers. By our calculations, just these two 747s will use as much fuel each week as our 48 other aircraft combined and emit as much CO<sub>2</sub>.”

That's why we're fooling ourselves. There is no green revolution, or, if there is, the counter-revolution is trumping it at every turn.

Without a transformational technological breakthrough in the energy space, all of the incremental gains we're making will be devoured by the exponential growth of all the new and old “Americans.”

— Thomas L. Friedman writes for *The New York Times*.