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Gov. Brown proposes 50% renewables goal in inaugural speech

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California Gov. Jerry Brown (D) today proposed requiring that his state's energy mix include at least 50 percent renewables by 2030, among a host of environmental initiatives he floated in his inaugural address to state lawmakers.

As Brown was sworn in for a historic fourth term, he vowed to continue a panoply of the state's progressive energy policies: expanding distributed generation, rooftop solar, microgrids, energy storage and electric vehicles. In addition to the renewables goal, he proposed by 2030 doubling the efficiency of existing buildings and reducing use of petroleum in cars and trucks by up to 50 percent below today's levels.

"Taking significant amounts of carbon out of our economy without harming its vibrancy is exactly the sort of challenge at which California excels," he said. "This is exciting. It is bold, and it is absolutely necessary if we are to have any chance of stopping potentially catastrophic changes to our climate system."

Raising the state's renewable portfolio standard (RPS) has been widely anticipated in California, which is on track to meet its current target of 33 percent by 2020. The state is also considering setting a new target for carbon dioxide emissions, above its existing goal of reducing emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. A bill introduced in the state Senate last year by Sen. Fran Pavley (D), S.B. 1125, would require the state to set a 2030 target by 2016.

Brown also cited the need for reducing methane, black carbon and other potent contributors to global warming, as well as managing farms, forests and wetlands to store more carbon dioxide.

"All of this is a very tall order," he said. "It means that we continue to transform our electrical grid, our transportation system and even our communities."

In 2008, voters rejected a ballot initiative that would have raised the RPS to 40 percent by 2020 and 50 percent by 2025. It failed, 64.5 percent to 35.5 percent, with utilities Pacific Gas & Electric and Southern California Edison as well as environmental groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council arguing that it was poorly written (*ClimateWire*, Oct. 9, 2008).

Brown called for cooperation and "pragmatic caution" in pursuing his goals.

"How we achieve these goals and at what pace will take great thought and imagination mixed with pragmatic caution," he said. "It will require enormous innovation, research and investment. And we will need active collaboration at every stage with our scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, businesses and officials at all levels."

Brown made only passing reference to two major infrastructure projects he has championed: a statewide high-speed rail line and an enormous water tunnel under the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

The minority leader of the state Assembly put out a statement criticizing those projects but steered clear of his environmental proposals.

"I am disappointed that in his fifth year, Governor Brown is still off chasing tunnels and trains instead of putting forward a plan to spur economic growth in California or to ensure our schools are preparing students for a 21st century

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economy," Assembly Republican leader Kristin Olsen said.

Environmentalists praised Brown's plans.

"The governor clearly signaled that he plans to use the next four years to actively help Californians reduce climate pollution," said Kathryn Phillips, director of Sierra Club California.

"It remains to be seen exactly which policies will be employed, but the goals the governor set out for 2030 are a strong first step to getting us where we need to be to avoid a planet-scale catastrophe."

Solar industry representatives also hailed the proposals.

"California's solar industry stands ready to build Gov. Brown's vision of a better, stronger, cleaner California," said CALSEIA Executive Director Bernadette Del Chiaro. "Through expanded solar power, California can give the power of the near-limitless sun to future generations while building a stronger economy today."

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