



Setting ^{THE} record straight

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Caution, consensus key to development of climate change action plan

There is a great deal of concern – and an equally great deal of differing opinions – on climate change and the extent of greenhouse gas emissions' contribution to global warming, as well as mankind's contribution since greenhouse gasses are also emitted by plants and animals and other natural processes. It comes as no surprise then, that there is a difference of opinion on how to best address the issue.

The Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry contends that it makes the most sense to develop climate change policy at the federal level because air is not bound by geographical boundaries, and because a hodgepodge of requirements at the federal, state and even local level could result in a potentially costly and confusing nightmare of red tape for the nation's regulated community. But as the federal government continues to grapple with the issue, Pennsylvania has decided, as many other states have done, to proceed on its own. And so, the debate in the Commonwealth begins...

Act 70 of 2008 allows the Commonwealth to begin developing a climate change action plan, and to create a Climate Change Advisory Committee to work with the Department of Environmental Protection to develop the policy. The advisory committee, which held an organizational meeting on Sept. 5, comprises a variety of stakeholders, including six representatives from the business community. Ensuring that business has a voice in the discussion was a priority for the PA Chamber, which worked with elected officials to include requirements for business representation in the law. As a result, the chamber supported Act 70 as the preferred option over other state-specific climate change proposals that had been under consideration.

Job creators and Commonwealth residents have much at stake in the debate. Caution and consensus are crucial to the development of a plan that rationally addresses climate change concerns while not economically harming industry in Pennsylvania or threatening our energy security. This can be achieved if DEP and the advisory committee embrace the following concepts:

- Pennsylvania's plan must be one that balances the energy consumption needs of Pennsylvanians with viable energy sources to meet those needs. Renewable energy should be part of the mix, but so too should environmentally friendly nuclear power, as well as clean coal. Business and residents are right to embrace conservation and energy efficiency, but the reality is, with progress comes an increasing demand for energy.
- If emission reduction timetables are ultimately recommended by the committee, they must consider whether or not the technology needed to meet those requirements is viable and ready for application.
- The advisory committee must have access to the most up-to-date science on the issue so that informed – not reactionary – decisions can be made. This will help to determine the most cost-effective way for Pennsylvania to proceed.
- There are some who believe that Pennsylvania can regulate itself into prosperity. While that's never been true, climate change is an issue that requires thinking beyond the "government mandate and regulation" box.
- Expectations for the advisory committee and its final product should not be attached to a predetermined outcome that supports a predetermined agenda by DEP or any stakeholder.
- Pennsylvania's climate change action plan must also recognize the great strides voluntarily being made by business to reduce their carbon footprint and embrace green technologies. Technological advancements and voluntary pollution reduction efforts by business are part of the reason why nationally, a number of emissions – airborne lead, particulate matter, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide – have experienced dramatic reductions over the past three decades while energy consumption has grown by more than 41 percent.

A number of voices are represented on the Climate Change Advisory Committee – all must be heard and all viewpoints considered. The business community welcomed the opportunity to have a seat at the table and looks forward to helping craft a sensible, workable climate change action plan for the Commonwealth, one that truly balances environmental protection with job and economic growth.

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The Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry is the state's largest broad-based business association, with its membership representing nearly 50 percent of the private workforce. More information is available on the Chamber's website at www.pachamber.org

