

Commentary | How Proposition 70 threatens climate investments



The Paradise Creek apartments development in National City was a much needed affordable housing project. Climate investment dollars were used for the project. (San Diego Union-Tribune file photo)

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California is facing a Trojan horse: Proposition 70. Though Proposition 70 may seem like an innocuous and even beneficial proposal, it is anything but. Proposition 70 is the result of a backroom deal cut out of political expediency that gives polluters and special interests more power in the future.

California uses a market system, known as cap-and-trade, as one way to limit climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions, and uses the revenues from that system to invest in pollution-fighting programs. Fifty-one percent of climate investment dollars so far have benefited disadvantaged communities and 31 percent have been invested directly in these communities.

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Auctions of pollution allowances bring in approximately \$3 billion a year, creating the potential to transform communities with affordable housing, renewable energy, clean transportation and new trees and greenways. Climate investments also create new jobs and services for our residents.

The effects of these climate investments can be found throughout San Diego. To date, more than \$160 million in climate investment dollars have been allocated to San Diego County. These funds help our Coaster and Breeze train services provide college students with discounted transit passes and have covered part of the costs to construct the South Bay Bus Rapid Transit Project. The nationally recognized Paradise Creek Apartments in National City received \$9 million in investment dollars. Nearly 18,000 clean vehicles have been purchased in San Diego County with rebates funded by the climate program.

All together, these investments have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by nearly a million metric tons, as well as helped improve air quality and ultimately, San Diegans' health.

However, Proposition 70 threatens to subject future climate investments to gridlock and political wrangling.

Proposition 70 rewrites the state Constitution to require a two-thirds vote to pass a spending plan for California's climate investment dollars in 2024. Until that two-thirds vote is achieved, the funds will sit unallocated in a special fund created by Proposition 70. Ostensibly, this is to ensure that California's climate investments continue to receive the support of the state Legislature. However, Proposition 70 does nothing to enhance oversight or accountability.

Rather, it gives special interests leverage over San Diegans.

The fact is two-thirds votes are extremely difficult to achieve, especially when money is on the line; it's important to note the legislation creating Proposition 70 was part of a deal to get a two-thirds vote on other bills. You don't have to be a historian or be an expert on

California politics to remember the state's prior experiences with two-thirds vote requirements.

It wasn't even a decade ago when California was the punch line of innumerable jokes and held up as a model of dysfunction due to the state's inability to pass a budget without gimmicks, giveaways and fuzzy math. The biggest factor in that dysfunction was the two-thirds vote requirement to pass a budget.

Polluters and special interests know this, and they will push for carve-outs and pork-barrel spending. This isn't just an idle projection of what could happen. Polluters are facing new requirements to refit or replace their equipment with cleaner technology.

Similarly, the state is beginning to implement locally developed strategies to clean up our most polluted communities. These efforts will yield tremendous health and air quality benefits, as well as reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, these goals will cost money to implement, some of which will be paid for by the polluters.

It's very likely that, under a two-thirds vote, California's climate investments will be diverted toward helping polluters rather than investing in our communities. And if the Legislature isn't able to get a two-thirds vote quickly, these investments will be held hostage, leaving successful programs, incentives and investments to languish.

If Proposition 70 were serious about oversight and accountability, it would have focused on helping community organizations apply for and guide California's climate investments.

In order to have community support and buy-in, transformative projects must be driven and led by the community itself. Rather, Proposition 70 seeks to undermine community-driven efforts in San Diego and across California and give leverage to special interests.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote no on Proposition 70.

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