

# San Diego Free Press

Grassroots News & Progressive Views

## Legislating a Just Transition off Fossil Fuels: San Diego Champions Lead on Climate and Energy Policies

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*By Gladys Limon / Executive Director of the California Environmental Justice Alliance*

Californians are united in our commitment to transitioning the state's power grid to renewable energy. A strong step in that direction was the passage of SB 100 (De León) into law, which sets a goal of transforming our state's electricity grid to zero-carbon sources by 2045, with an upgrade to the 2030 goal from 50 percent renewables to 60 percent.

Many California cities, including San Diego, Del Mar, and Chula Vista have set their city targets at 100 percent renewable by 2035.

Now, the real work begins: equitably implementing the transition. We need follow-up state and city regulations to ensure that the communities overburdened by fossil-fuel pollution and climate change impacts have ready access to the economic and public health benefits of this transition.

A missed opportunity in the 2018 legislative session was a bill aimed at preventing excess pollution from natural gas power plants. As California expands renewable energy, existing power plants could actually get dirtier, since turning a gas power plant on and off—called cycling—can emit up to 30 times more pollution per hour than continuous operation. SB 64 (Wieckowski) would have protected communities impacted by poor air quality by requiring collection and reporting of emissions data of fossil-fueled electrical facilities and a study with recommendations of how to reduce or eliminate air emissions from electrical generation. Unfortunately, SB 64 died on the Assembly floor.

SB 100 and SB 64 are two of more than a dozen bills included in the California Environmental Justice Alliance's 2018 Environmental Justice Legislative Scorecard. The CEJA scorecard assesses how well California's elected officials supported legislation addressing the cumulative impacts of poverty and pollution and securing good local jobs in our communities.

The EJ Scorecard reveals that a select group of legislators introduce, support and strengthen real solutions, while a much larger group sit on the sidelines or actively resist measures to improve public health, working conditions, and climate mitigation and resilience.

San Diego-area state elected officials in particular show consistent support for EJ policies. Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins worked hard for multiple EJ bills and has shown outstanding leadership for San Diego and the entire state. San Diego Assemblymembers Todd Gloria, Lorena Gonzalez-Fletcher, and Shirley Weber also scored high in CEJA's 2018 Scorecard.

These elected representatives, together with local San Diego leaders, are propelling our state forward. In San Diego, there is an exciting opportunity—and challenge—to make the San Diego Climate Action Plan part of the solution to advance a Just Transition from fossil fuels.

As detailed in a recent report by the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC), [“Start Here, Start Now,”](#) San Diego can become a leader in bringing equity to residents already overburdened by the impacts of pollution and poverty by adopting some straightforward recommended measures: Being transparent about how much climate funding and investments goes to EJ communities, increasing direct investment proportionate to the population of environmental justice communities, and investing more in public transit, as transportation is the single-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. These recommendations are equally applicable to much-need statewide measures.

Combining state-supported energy investments with city-led initiatives can transform our toxic hotspots into healthy neighborhoods. The Solar on Multi-Family Affordable Housing (SOMAH) program of the CPUC, born of AB 693 (Eggman) passed in 2015, is about to launch. SOMAH will invest \$1 billion for solar on affordable housing in disadvantaged and low-income communities. San Diego should move decisively to adopt this program.

As our nation faces a critical mid-term election, we must strengthen our commitment to elect representatives who fight for clean air, affordable housing, quality jobs and improving economic prospects in low-income communities of color.

*Gladys Limon is Executive Director of the California Environmental Justice Alliance which publishes the annual Environmental Justice Scorecard at [www.caleja.org/scorecard2018](http://www.caleja.org/scorecard2018).*