

The Salt Lake Tribune

MARCH 27 2012

Salt Lake City urges federal climate action

By Brandon Loomis

Salt Lake City is urging President Barack Obama and the Environmental Protection Agency to “swiftly employ and enforce” the Clean Air Act to battle climate change.

Noting a 2007 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that defined carbon dioxide as an air pollutant regulated by the Clean Air Act, the City Council on Tuesday night approved a joint resolution with Mayor Ralph Becker asking for federal action. The resolution also asserts the city’s pride “on being a leader in protecting the environment, with particular emphasis on clean air.”

Peter Ashcroft, a Salt Lake City resident backing the resolution, told council members in an afternoon work session that the nudge from local leaders is important because federal authority over greenhouse gas emissions has been “under attack” virtually since the Supreme Court ruling. The EPA has used the authority to increase vehicle fuel-efficiency standards, but stricter regulations have been elusive.

“The Clean Air Act is almost the only tool there is,” Ashcroft said.

Most council members agreed, though Councilman Carlton Christensen questioned the need for injecting the city into national politics. He was the only one to vote against the resolution.

“Philosophically, I have some concern about asking the federal government to enforce on that,” he said, adding he fully supports the local government’s efforts to curb pollution. “I question the long-term value of this and what impact that would have on the national stage.”

Supporters said Salt Lake City is adding its voice to a larger effort that already includes resolutions from Kansas City, Mo., Cincinnati, Seattle and Milwaukee.

The resolution recaps city actions on air pollution, including a 2008 goal to reduce carbon emissions and resulting shifts in business practices, and participation in the Climate Adaptation Planning Alliance, a collaboration with Western cities in similarly arid climates.

It also notes that the peer-reviewed work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Cli-

mate Change recognizes that humans are contributing to the increase in greenhouse gas emissions, and says the current atmospheric CO₂ level of 392 parts per million is above the 350 parts per million level that studies have indicated would be best for preserving the environment.

The resolution recounts how the Clean Air Act helped clear Salt Lake City’s air of significant pollutants contributing to particulate matter and ground-level ozone between 1970 and 1990, in some cases by as much as 93 percent, while virtually eliminating lead from the air.

Besides requesting federal action, the council also reiterated its support for local education efforts and to changing its own practices and maximizing transit and walking options while protecting the urban forest.