

# San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

## 3 states, province sign West Coast climate pact



Gov. Jerry Brown shakes hands after signing a climate-change agreement with the governors of Washington and Oregon and the British Columbia minister of environment in San Francisco. Photo: Sarah Rice, Special To The Chronicle

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David R. Baker

With climate-change legislation stymied at the federal level, a coalition of West Coast states and one Canadian province on Monday signed a regional pact to rein in greenhouse gas emissions and fight global warming.

The governors of California, Oregon and Washington, along with the premier of British Columbia, agreed to put a price on carbon dioxide emissions across an area that includes 53 million people.

Under the Pacific Coast Action Plan on Climate and Energy, the four West Coast governments will also use similar rules to encourage the use of alternative fuels and the adoption of electric cars. And they will hunt for ways to deal with ocean acidification, a side effect of rising carbon dioxide levels and a deadly threat to shellfish.

“It is time, clearly, because we are the first generation to feel the sting of climate change, and we are the last generation that can do something about it,” said Washington Gov. Jay Inslee in San Francisco, where he joined California Gov. Jerry Brown and

Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber to sign the pact. British Columbia Premier Christy Clark met with the three earlier in the day via teleconference.

The pact will shape climate-change policies in a region that ranks as the world's fifth-largest economy, with an annual gross domestic product of \$2.8 trillion.

### **Pact needs others**

But Brown and his counterparts acknowledged Monday that the agreement won't have much effect if they can't entice other states, provinces and possibly whole countries to join. National climate-change legislation in the United States has been blocked in Congress, where some lawmakers from both parties fear potential economic costs - while others deny that man-made global warming exists. Brown and his fellow Democratic governors expressed frustration at the lack of federal progress.

"This is the initiation of a very important agreement on the West Coast, but it's got to spread east, and it's got to spread west," Brown said. "To actually utter the words 'global warming' is deviant and radical in 2013. But here we are, and we're doing it."

The three states and one province won't necessarily use the same approach to putting a price on carbon. There are several options. California last year launched a cap-and-trade system, in which the state sets a declining annual limit on greenhouse gas emissions. Companies buy and sell permits to emit those gases, with the number of permits shrinking slowly over time. British Columbia, in contrast, uses a simple "carbon tax" of \$30 Canadian (\$28.73 U.S.) per ton of greenhouse gas emissions. The tax is included in fuel prices and is used to offset other provincial taxes. Washington and Oregon

have yet to choose either system. The legislatures of both states considered cap-and-trade bills in 2009 but didn't adopt them because of concerns about the potential economic impact.

The new pact commits Inslee and Kitzhaber to giving carbon pricing another try. Oregon, it says, will "build on existing programs to set a price on carbon emissions." Washington "will set binding limits on carbon emissions and deploy market mechanisms to meet those limits."

### **'Failure is not an option'**

"The people of Washington clearly want a limit, a cap on carbon pollution, and a price," Inslee said. "The mechanism is something we're going to work on. The one thing is, failure is not an option."

The House of Representatives passed a global warming bill in 2009 that would have created a national cap-and-trade system. But President Obama didn't make it a priority, throwing his effort into health care reform instead, and the bill died in the Senate. Many congressional Republicans now publicly doubt the existence of man-made climate change, making any new federal global warming law unlikely.

There's no guarantee Monday's regional agreement will fare any better. In 2008, the same participants announced a global-warming pact that also included Arizona, Montana, Manitoba, New Mexico, Ontario, Quebec and Utah. The four provinces and seven states, working together as the Western Climate Initiative, planned to build a cap-and-trade system spanning 20 percent of the U.S. economy and 70 percent of Canada's.

Only California and Quebec persevered. Quebec is expected to join California's cap-and-trade system next year.

The new pact grew out of a 5-year-old regional initiative called the Pacific Coast Collaborative, which also includes Alaska. But Alaska, heavily dependent on the oil industry, did not join the new agreement.

### **Protest against fracking**

The politics of oil intruded on Monday's signing ceremony as well. Demonstrators opposed to hydraulic fracturing gathered outside, chanting "Jerry Brown, don't let us down! Ban fracking now!"

Inside, Brown urged critics to wait for the results of a state-commissioned study of fracking's potential dangers to air quality, water supplies and climate change.

"I think we ought to give science a chance," Brown said. "Everybody ought to be excited, critics and supporters alike, because California will provide the information to take this debate to the next level."