

The General Assembly is expected to consider legislation that will ensure that motor vehicles in Pennsylvania conform to a federal emissions standard, not a stricter California standard as proposed by the Department of Environmental Protection. The issue is beginning to generate public interest, and some confusion. Below is a letter from two key state senators in response to an editorial published recently in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Adopting the California standard, the senators maintain, will result in needlessly higher prices for gasoline, among other negative reactions. Beneath the letter is the original editorial.

Clean Vehicle Program -- Response to Post-Gazette from Senators Madigan and M.J. White.

Text of November 10 letter.

Letters to the Editor
Pittsburgh Post Gazette
34 Boulevard of the Allies
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Dear Editor:

We are writing to take issue with your editorial (Legislators Blow Smoke on Clean Air Standards).

The Post Gazette's readers deserve more than its editors misrepresenting the facts about this important issue. First, Pennsylvania did not adopt California's vehicle emission standards years ago. In fact, Pennsylvania cars are currently held to the federal standards (Tier II), standards which our own state Department of Environmental Protection has commended as being more protective of public health than previous ones. Unfortunately, legislators have also had to deal with statements from the Administration that Pennsylvania stands to lose federal highway funds. This charge is flat out wrong and irresponsible, and was made up by the Administration to scare legislators into voting against HB-2141. Likewise, the October 18 EQB Board meeting was not an endorsement of the underlying policy; it was simply a vote to solicit public comment. Legislative representatives made quite clear the perils of adopting regulations set by California.

What we are talking about is a fundamental shift by DEP to allow the state of California to set vehicle emission standards for the residents of Pennsylvania. California faces entirely different air quality issues than Pennsylvania, and California vehicles use a significantly more expensive fuel to deal with their air quality issues. In fact, the Pennsylvania legislature had the foresight years ago to prohibit the use of California fuel because it can cost Pennsylvanians at least 60 cents per gallon more than the fuel we use now. The Post-Gazette should be properly researching this issue, and taking strong issue with the tactics employed by the Administration to mislead both the public and the media.

Sincerely,

Roger Madigan, Chairman
Senate Transportation Committee

Mary Jo White, Chairman
Senate Environmental Resources
& Energy Committee

Editorial: More dirty doings / Legislators blow smoke on clean air standards

Thursday, November 10, 2005

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

As witnessed on Tuesday, voter fury has been focused on the nasty surprise of a legislative pay increase -- but that is not the only fast one pulled lately in Harrisburg. While boosting lawmakers' salaries hurts Pennsylvania's collective pocket, a proposal before the state House would harm the very air we breathe.

House Bill 2141 -- which would torpedo the state's clean-air standards for vehicles -- is another case study in arrogance and abuse of power. True, it didn't proceed in the middle of the night, but it was brazen just the same, done without public hearings or notice of a vote.

It happened in the House Transportation Committee. HB 2141, which is now awaiting action by the House, is simple enough on its face. It would strip the Pennsylvania Environmental Quality Board of its authority to set regulations for low-emission vehicle standards set by California, which is the benchmark used by a number of states. The board had voted unanimously Oct. 18 to start a public comment period on the proposed new rules.

Nothing in this should have been alarming. This process began under the Ridge administration and the legislative members of both parties who sit on the environmental board joined the vote to proceed with what is called the Clean Vehicles Program. But then the Republicans on the Transportation Committee decided to pitch a bill that would appeal to the peanut gallery.

Environmental and public-health advocates were appalled -- and that anger ought to spread to the public at large. If this bill were to succeed, the emissions standard would revert to a weaker federal standard. Inevitably, the many Pennsylvanians who have asthma or other lung conditions would pay a price. Indeed, the commonwealth itself might have to forgo more than \$1 billion in federal highway funding. Already 37 counties, including Allegheny County, fall into the Environmental Protection Agency's "nonattainment" category for ground level ozone.

That this bill is proposed as public policy is foolish. That the committee acted upon it without hearings is outrageous. House members should redeem themselves by quietly ditching this bill.