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California House Delegation Urges EPA Action on Cheaper, Cleaner Fuels

WASHINGTON (Thursday, March 18, 2004) — Rep. Chris Cox (CA-48), Rep. Henry Waxman (CA-30), and members of the California House delegation today sent a letter to EPA Administrator Michael Leavitt expressing support for Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's recent request for a waiver of the Clean Air Act's ethanol/MTBE mandate for California. This waiver would allow California to use cleaner blends of gasoline, while saving consumers money at the pump.

The letter was signed by 52 of the 53 members of the California delegation.

For five years, California has sought a waiver allowing it to sell cleaner-burning gasoline without oxygenates such as MTBE and ethanol. EPA's Blue Ribbon Panel on Oxygenate in Gasoline reported on September 15, 1999, that "within California, lifting the oxygenate requirement will result in greater flexibility to maintain and enhance emission reductions, particularly as California pursues new formulation requirements for gasoline." Although last year the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals vacated the EPA's 2001 decision to deny a waiver, the EPA still has not granted the waiver request.

"For over a decade, the congressional mandate that California use ethanol or MTBE has set back our efforts to achieve cleaner air and water, while driving up the cost of gasoline to consumers," said Rep. Cox. "The California congressional delegation has once again asked that the EPA consider a proposal that makes sense for California's environment and its economy."

California has already banned MTBE, one of the most commonly used oxygenates, because it poses significant risks to the state's groundwater and surface water resources. Without the requested waiver, California's efforts to meet its fuel needs will continue to require massive use of ethanol--a complicated and costly mandate that the California Air Resources Board asserts will jeopardize California's attainment of federal ozone standards.

The EPA recently found that the oxygenate requirement was not necessary for either New Hampshire or Arizona to meet their clean air goals. The resulting flexibility could allow the states to produce clean gasoline in the most cost-effective way possible. Today, the delegation asks EPA to allow California similar flexibility to use cleaner-burning gasoline, whether or not it contains oxygenates.

"California can improve its air quality, address the threat MTBE poses to our water, and alleviate the excessive prices for gasoline, but the oxygenate waiver is crucial to this effort. I am deeply disappointed that the U.S. EPA has not yet granted California's request," said Rep. Waxman (D-Los Angeles).

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