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Lockyer: Sell bonds for 'green' buildings

A \$5 billion measure could retrofit state's holdings, he says.

By Peter Hecht - Bee Capitol Bureau

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State Treasurer Bill Lockyer on Tuesday proposed a \$5 billion bond measure to combat global warming by getting California's largest building owner -- the state government -- to improve its energy efficiency.

Lockyer said he wants the Legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign off on a November 2008 ballot measure to retrofit the state's massive building inventory with solar panels and other clean energy technologies.

In a meeting with The Bee Capitol Bureau, Lockyer said the state needs to move "as rapidly as possible" to "green our buildings" if it is serious about its commitment to cut California's greenhouse gases by 25 percent by 2020.

Lockyer, who has served in state government since 1973, also all but ruled out that he will seek to crown his career by running for governor in 2010.

For now, Lockyer said he is hoping to persuade the current governor and two-thirds of the Legislature to place a measure on the ballot to help state government battle climate change, starting with its own buildings.

Schwarzenegger has called for market-based solutions to entice private industry to comply with the state's landmark Global Warming Solutions Act, Assembly Bill 32, passed last year.

Lockyer suggested Tuesday that the anti-global warming effort lacks credibility unless the state takes measures to ensure that some 206 million square feet of building space employ the most up-to-date technologies for energy efficiency and cutting pollution.

"We have these very ambitious goals for greenhouse gas reductions and energy savings," Lockyer said. "If the public sector doesn't make an adequate effort to meet those goals, then the burden is greater on the private sector.

"If someone wants to shift the burden by not having the state 'green' its buildings, then it just becomes much more onerous for the private sector."

Some 78 percent of state residents in a recent Public Policy Institute of California poll said they support the state's new anti-global warming law, and another 84 percent backed efforts to require automakers to cut emissions on new cars sold in California.

Lockyer said he is banking on such voter sentiments in hopes that Californians would pass a \$5 billion bond to pay for \$3.5 billion to convert state buildings to solar and \$1.5 billion to retrofit facilities with other clean technologies or energy-saving programs.

Lockyer said he has received encouragement -- including an enthusiastic high-five -- from Schwarzenegger for his proposal but said the governor has yet to endorse the plan.

Schwarzenegger spokesman Bill Maile said the governor's staff is reviewing Lockyer's proposal.

"The governor has made greening buildings a top priority," said Maile. He pointed to the Schwarzenegger-backed \$3.3 billion "million solar roofs" program that pays incentives to private businesses and homeowners installing solar systems.

Lockyer said studies indicate that the state could earn as much as \$863 million in energy savings for each \$500 million spent to make its buildings more efficient.

Lockyer said he has shopped his proposal for potential authors in the Legislature, but he said he won't push the idea to lawmakers during the state's current budget stalemate.

"We are awaiting the right time and the right chemistry," Lockyer said. "At this moment, it's probably not the right time to engage them."

Meanwhile, Lockyer, who is currently California's longest-serving state official, said there probably won't be a right time for him to run for governor.

Lockyer, who flirted with a 2006 gubernatorial bid before changing his mind, said it is unlikely he will seek the top job.

"I wouldn't say that it's an absolute impossibility, but it's very improbable," said Lockyer, who said he most likely will instead seek re-election as treasurer.

Lockyer, a former state attorney general and Senate president pro tem, said friends have told him his long experience makes him well qualified for governor. But he openly expressed doubts he had the financial resources or popularity to win.

"I don't have any reason just to be running, unless it looks like there is a good outcome," Lockyer said. "Thinking you can do it and getting it are two different matters."

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