



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

# EARTH DAY

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## Native Son

By Elizabeth Smilor

*State Senator Jerry Hill brings a lifetime of experience to Committee on Environmental Quality*

State Senator Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo, sees Earth Day as a time to reflect on his lifelong commitment to protecting California's environment.

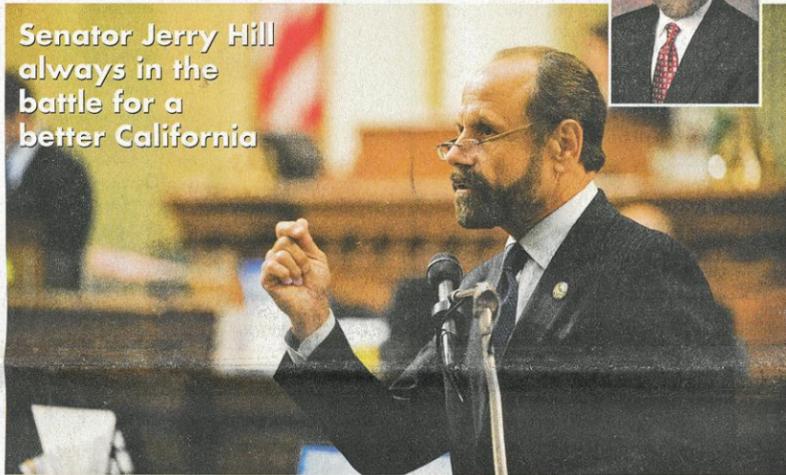
"When I was in high school in San Francisco in the 1960s, I remember playing football and on very warm days the smog was so thick I could only run about 10 yards and then I'd be bent over and hacking," he recalls.

The newly appointed chair of the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality knows we've come a long way toward improving air quality and protecting all our natural resources in California.

"It doesn't mean the job's done," he continues. "There are still challenges to be met."

Hill and his committee soon will take up such issues as whether to revise the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), how to regulate fracking and how to continue to improve the state's drinking water.

**Senator Jerry Hill always in the battle for a better California**



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— Carl Guardino, co-chair of the CEQA Working Group and CEO of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group.

Hill, who was elected to the Senate in November, has an extensive environmental background. As a State Assemblyman for four years he was recognized for his 100 percent pro-environment voting record from the Sierra Club and the League of Conservation Voters. During the 2009-2010 legislative session he received the Clean Water Champion Award from Clean Water Action for his leadership in support of California communities, clean water and the environment. He also previously served on the California Air Resources Board and on the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board of Directors.

He comes to the committee chair job with support from environmental groups as well as business leaders.

"Senator Hill is a smart and thoughtful choice as the new Chair of the Senate Environmental Quality Committee," said Carl Guardino, co-chair of the CEQA Working Group and CEO of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group. "This appointment only underscores Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg's commitment to keeping California both golden and green — with the highest environmental standards in the world, coupled with the need for a vibrant economy that creates jobs."

Equally as positive about Hill's appointment was Sierra Club California Director Kathryn Phillips:

"We commend Senator Steinberg for appointing Senator Hill to chair the Senate Environmental Quality Committee. This is one of the most important committees in the legislature and deserves to be led by someone who has a strong environmental record, as does Senator Hill."

For his part, Senator Hill hopes to work with both sides especially in reviewing CEQA, the most immediate and divisive topic the environmental committee will face.

"Hopefully I will be able to work with both sides to get to the heart of the issue and what the facts truly are," he says.

Critics of CEQA, including Gov. Jerry Brown, contend the law has been used to push other agendas. They argue that business rivals use it to stifle competition, NIMBYs ("not in my back yard") to block local projects and labor unions to aid in their negotiations.

"I want to see if those are valid criticisms," Hill says. "No one criticizes the act itself and the benefits we have reaped from it. It would be hard to argue that CEQA has stifled growth in California for the last 40 years."

Environmentalists worry that a revision of CEQA will weaken its intended purpose. Hill wants to "cut through the background noise."

"CEQA should do what it was designed to do when it was created 40 years ago and that's to protect our environment by making sure there are checks and balances in place to vet projects," Hill says. "It should make sure they conform to the environmental standards."

Another important issue in Hill's mind is the quality of drinking water in California. "It's hard to believe that we still have areas where drinking water is not safe," he says.

He hopes the committee will address this topic to help areas of the state where pollution has affected

ground water and forced people to drink bottled water.

"It's something we need to fix," he concludes. "We want to make sure everyone in California has access to clean, safe drinking water."

Directly related to the issue of ground water protection is the possible expansion of fracking in the state. Fracking or hydraulic fracturing is a process by which oil can be extracted from shale.

There are about 15 billion barrels of oil in the Monterey Shale, which underlies 1,750 square miles between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Recently, University of Southern California researchers projected that developing the Monterey will add nearly 3 million jobs and close to \$25 billion in tax revenues by 2020.

Environmentalists argue fracking will pollute our water, increase greenhouse gas emissions and pollute the air. Legislation has already been proposed to put a moratorium on fracking while the environmental effects are studied. That legislation will likely come before the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality.

Hill summed it up this way: "As new technologies come forward we need to make sure that we have the appropriate regulations and safeguards in place. We have to make sure we, as a committee, are not overly influenced by the revenue and jobs at the expense of the environment. That's our role." ☺