



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on August 12, 2011

Obama's Commerce Secretary Nominee Calls for Carbon Tax

Bryson, retired CEO of the electric utility Southern California Edison (SCE) and its parent company Edison International, excused the practice, saying, "That's been a part of the regulatory environment for the investor-owned utilities for as long as I've been close to it."

He has been close to it for more than three decades, but his resume shows that the current regulatory environment is largely his legacy rather than his inheritance. His bureaucratic career began in 1976 when then-Governor Jerry Brown appointed him to California's State Water Resources Control Board and as chair of the state Public Utilities Commission three years later. David Bier of the Competitive Enterprise Institute describes the outcome of his public service. "Bryson helped create a regulatory structure that fixed utilities' profits at a percent of costs. As a result, the utilities make money not by bringing costs down and selling more electricity, but by raising costs with unnecessary, expensive and redundant projects." In his August 3 op-ed, Bier also detailed several government bailouts Bryson secured for SCE during his tenure that saved the utility from bankruptcy and funded his \$65 million retirement package in 2008.



Writing for the *Cal Watchdog*, Wayne Lusvardi explains Bryson's current interest in government subsidies of renewable energy technology. "Today Bryson serves as CEO and President of BrightSource Energy and is on the board of Coda Automotive, both heavily dependent on government subsidies," he wrote. "BrightSource Energy is the recipient of a \$1.37 billion Federal loan guarantee to build a seven square mile solar energy project in the Mojave Desert."

Senator James Inhofe (R-Okla.), Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, [described](#) Bryson as the "founder of the radical Natural Resources Defense Council, a left-wing environmentalist organization, which in the name of global warming, seeks to increase drastically the price of electricity and gasoline across America." In July, Inhofe placed a hold on Bryson's nomination, in cooperation with a grass-roots movement launched by the American Conservative Union and



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Freedom Action Campaign (FAC). In an FAC press release, Brian McGraw called Bryson an environmental ideologue and drew the analogy: "Imagine how environmentalists would react to the CEO of ExxonMobil being elected to run the Environmental Protection Agency."

Admiral James Watkins and former Clinton advisor Charlie Curtis defended Bryson's nomination, describing him in an August 10 article as "the right person to lead the Commerce Department." Yet Bryson himself is perfectly frank in his support of commerce-stifling public policy. At a 2010 Energy Symposium at the University of California, Berkeley, he stated that he not only prefers expanding carbon regulations and imposing a direct tax but also favors cap-and-trade "which is a more complicated way of getting at it." With a wry smile he added, "It has the advantage politically of sort of hiding the fact that you have a tax. You know, that's what you're trying to do. You're trying to raise the price of carbon to externalize those costs to send ... a better market signal."

Photo of John Bryson (left) with Arnold Schwarzenegger: AP Images



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