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Viewpoint: Blakeslee protecting your health with bill

By Maureen Gorsen

One of the most significant pieces of bipartisan legislation to protect consumers in recent years was signed into law in 2008, known as the Green Chemistry Initiative. Co-authored by Central Coast state Sen. Sam Blakeslee, democratic Assemblymen Feuer, Huffman, Hernandez and Solorio and with its companion, SB 509, by Sens. Simitian and Calderon, AB 1879 created the first-ever environmental regulatory program to allow bans on ingredients in everyday consumer products once a safer substitute has been scientifically identified.

Unfortunately, instead of The Tribune recounting the backstory of Sen. Blakeslee's critical leadership, as the only Republican to co-sponsor this groundbreaking environmental regulatory program, it took Blakeslee to task in both an editorial and a news article for merely being consistent with his policy views, and the green chemistry laws passed with broad bipartisan support. The senator has consistently followed his principled and scientifically informed position that chemical ban bills are often counterproductive and do more harm than good.

In contrast, The Tribune irrefutably posits that anyone who cares about babies should support a ban on bisphenol-A (BPA).

In 2008, the state Legislature was considering dozens of chemical ban bills, including a bill to ban BPA and even bills that proposed to ban the chemical substitutions resulting from previous ban bills. Understanding that without knowledge of potential substitutions and adequate scientific analysis, a ban bill could do more harm than good, leaders from both sides of the aisle sought a novel, first-of-its-kind solution. AB 1879 gives unprecedented authority to the California Environmental Protection Agency's Department of Toxic Substances Control to regulate chemical ingredients in products and to require comparative scientific analysis of product ingredient choices to ensure that regulatory decisions lead to the safest products.

The Tribune's editorial cites the fact that Canada, the European Union and other jurisdictions have banned BPA, to breezily conclude "so obviously, substitute compounds are available."

But does The Tribune care what BPA has been replaced with and what the toxic attributes of those substitute compounds are?

Sen. Blakeslee does.

Trained as a scientist, Sen. Blakeslee knows that it is very difficult for a chemist in a laboratory developing new molecular structures to predict whether those structures will lead to a toxic product or a safe product. Considering this difficulty, and the lack of any scientific apparatus in the state Legislature to conduct comparative toxicological studies in order to make the best decision on what is safest, Sen. Blakeslee deserves much credit for co-sponsoring this solution, which places a rare focus on the quest for safer replacements. He will enjoy a legacy that will exponentially increase cooperation and information sharing between environmental health scientists and green chemists who are seeking to better understand the connections between chemical properties and toxic endpoints. The progress that is likely to flow from this law will make it easier to recognize chemical hazards as a design flaw, thereby leading to more rapid switches to safer products at the outset, not after they've been sold to millions.

So hang on to your diapers, babies! Sen. Blakeslee cares deeply about your health and has co-sponsored thoughtful legislation to ensure that emotional, reactive and impulsive media editorials don't result in ban bills that could lead to harmful substitutions, and that science, not politics, determines consumer safety.

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