

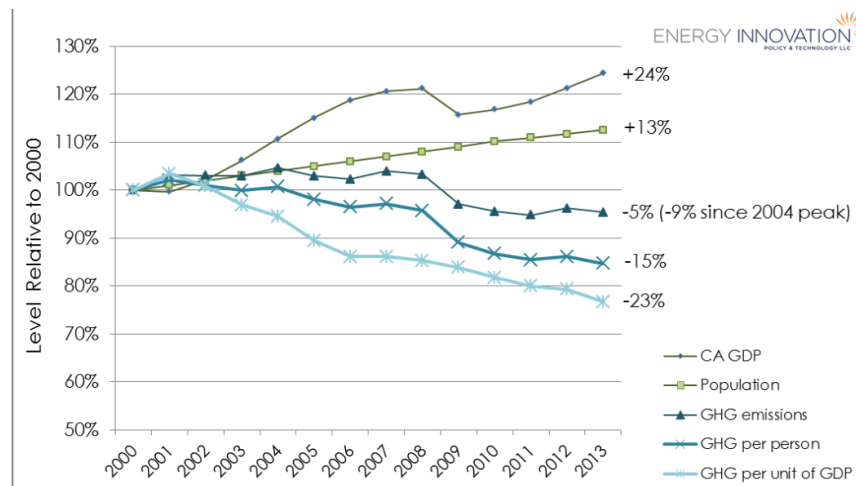
## “The Environment or the Economy?”

Similar to disastrous and backwards economic philosophies that promote profits over people – some corporate giants deny the existence of climate change, put the future of our children at risk, and advocate for cutting environmental regulations to make a quick profit. They use scare tactics and push us to ‘pick a side’ – the environment or the economy. However, in California, it’s clear – addressing climate change strengthens our economy.

“California is the chief reason America is the only developed economy to achieve record GDP growth since the financial crisis of 2008 and ensuing global recession,” according to data compiled by Bloomberg. <sup>1</sup>

Despite the ongoing global question of “is it the economy or the environment”, California has answered this question – our robust economy benefits from our progressive policies to address climate change.

California is a model for effective climate change policies. Greenhouse gas emissions have been decreasing and our economy has grown faster than the rest of the nation after the recession. The below graph shows greenhouse gas reductions, CA pollution growth and CA state GDP growth. While our state population has grown, our carbon emissions have decreased and our GDP has increased! <sup>2</sup>



**Good News:** CA has proven that we do not have pick between the economy and the environment!

**Bad News:** While California economy has grown, income inequality has grown too!

- Between 1980 and 2010, the incomes of California families in the poorest 10<sup>th</sup> percentile dropped roughly 24%; over the same time span, the incomes of the wealthiest 10 percentile grew 34%.
- In 2014, 33% of California workers held low wage jobs with 62% of those low wage jobs held by Black and Latino workers who only make up 44% of the workforce.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-05-10/california-leads-u-s-economy-away-from-trump>

<sup>2</sup> [http://energyinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CA\\_LowCarbonStory.pdf](http://energyinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CA_LowCarbonStory.pdf)

Additionally, climate change will make California's inequality worse due to the climate gap. The Climate Gap refers to the fact that low socioeconomic groups (or low wage earners) – mostly racial and ethnic minorities – experience significantly more negative health and economic impacts from the effects of climate change.

Low wage earners spend a larger percentage of their income (because they make less) on food, water and energy than wealthy persons. Because of the shifts in our climate, our food, water and energy will be harder to grow and cultivate, leading to an increase in cost of these necessities. This will increase the cost to all groups – however, the lower socioeconomic groups will be the most negatively affected.

Job sectors that predominantly employ low socioeconomic status groups are the sectors who will be affected by climate change too. For example, the agriculture industry will be experiencing fundamental change in how we grow due to the shifts in rain. This will have a ripple effect on jobs in this industry. As the climate becomes more volatile, our jobs will become less predictable.

Also, low wage earners have less access to insurance, less access to affordable capital, and fewer financial resources that will create insurmountable hurdles after extreme weather events. Reconstruction of homes and businesses in the lower socioeconomic groups will take longer after floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters caused by our changing climate. Our communities and economy are at risk when climate change is not addressed.

### **We know how to stop climate change and address income disparity!**

We should track the investments that our local, state and federal policies make to ensure a proportional amount of public funds are invested in lower socioeconomic communities.

We need to ensure climate change policies invest in creating a sustainable economy that lifts up working families and strengthens our middle-class.

We need to ensure green jobs maintain and create pathways into the middle-class. It is essential to link policy with programs and projects. Local Hire Agreements, joint labor-management apprenticeship partnering opportunities, workforce safety standards and certifications, and responsible contractor criteria are some of the tools that policy makers and decision makers can employ to create family-sustaining jobs that provide upward mobility and career opportunities

Climate change is a complex challenge, and inequality is deeply embedded throughout our society. We must work with our community partners to ensure local, state and federal policies fight climate change and fight income inequality.

*To learn more about the Environmental Caucus of the San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council, visit: <http://www.unionyes.org/environmental-caucus/>.*