

# Gary Gero

**ROBIN LANGASTER** TALKS TO GARY GERO, PRESIDENT OF THE CLIMATE ACTION RESERVE

One day, back in the early 1970s, a young Gary Gero set off on his bicycle to school in California's San Fernando Valley. On that day, the Los Angeles (LA) smog was so bad that he couldn't see the end of the street. "It was eerie, like being in a movie surrounded by menacing fog. But it wasn't fog and it was an otherwise sunny day," an adult Gero, president of the LA-based Climate Action Reserve (CAR), told *Trading Carbon*.

He made it to school, but that day, together with pictures of the planet from the 1969 moon landing and the first Earth Day in 1970, shaped Gero's future. "Those three things are indelibly etched on my mind. They gave me a frame of reference as an individual that the environment is the most important thing," he said.

As president of the California-based CAR, Gero oversees a non-profit organisation that has established a national carbon offsets programme in the US. CAR's protocols have made it the leading voluntary standard in the US in terms of number of projects (see pages 23–28). Yet, the Reserve's role is set to change. California's plans for carbon cap-and-trade recognise, so far, four of CAR's offset protocols. Thus, allowing the reserve's protocols to be used for projects that create credits for compliance purposes in the scheme, which will start in 2012. Change is something that isn't new to an organisation that started life as the California Climate Action Registry, an inventory for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions.

"We continue to evolve and we see the future of this organisation focussed on the regulatory market," said Gero. He also expects CAR to be involved with the Western Climate Initiative (WCI) – a regional carbon market including California and some provinces of Canada initially. "But it doesn't stop there," he said. "We're testing the concept of cap-and-trade as a policy to address global warming. With California, WCI and other regimes we can start to build a national effort."

Gero, like many others in this space, was disappointed by the US Senate failure to enact federal climate legislation last year. And he

**Gary Gero: Making a career out of blending economics and environmental issues**

is not optimistic that Congress will re-approach carbon markets any time soon. "The moment has passed. We're not going to see anything for at least two years (in Congress) and I wouldn't be surprised if that is three or four years," he said.

But, as a Californian born and bred – "I go to the beach and surf and do all the things you'd expect a Californian to do" – Gero is proud of the way the state's voters have backed cap-and-trade. In last November's elections, voters crushed so-called "proposition 23", which would have effectively stopped California's climate plans, including emissions trading. "It gave the message: we're going to step up; we're going to show leadership," he said.

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*Gary Gero, Climate Action Reserve*

In a 25-year career, Gero has almost solely concentrated on the environment. In various roles at the City of LA municipality or the LA Department of Water and Power, he has mixed his enthusiasm for the environment with his academic background in economics. "It's been fortuitous that the idea of market-based regulation of the environment started to grab a hold about 20 years ago. I was able to blend the ideas of economics and environment to be in the right place at the right time. CAR is built on environmental scientists and economists. The programme has to be a blend of the two," he said.

Going forward, his future plans for CAR are unchanged from when he joined. "My motivation and the organisation's remain the same: to ensure that there are real, legitimate and credible claims to be made about greenhouse gas offsets and to make sure what we do benefits the environment. We're part

of the market-based solution to climate change – a brick in the wall." ●

