Background

The Southern Legislative Conference recognizes that a clean environment is a desire and goal of the nation and of the states represented by SLC. The issue of "acid rain" and acid deposition continues to be a complex scientific phenomenon and controversial political problem.

Extensive research and monitoring by the National Acid Precipitation Assessment Program and other involved groups are helping to identify the causes of acid deposition as well as improve the ability to assess acid deposition damage upon aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. There continues to be a lack of conclusive information on cause and effect relationships contributing to acid deposition. Recent research has shown that emissions of sulfur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen contribute to reductions in air quality. They are not, however, the sole contributors to reduced air quality. Other air pollutants such as ozone, hydrocarbons and heavy metals may be important factors in such impacts as reduced forest growth and human health effects.

Several of the southern states are large producers of coal, and a majority of the states generate most of their electric power with coal. In addition, many states are expanding their utilization of coal for power generation and industrial use. To reduce unreasonably our ability to use coal for the generation of electricity and industrial power would not be in the interest of the southern states or the nation.

Implementation of the nation's Clean Air Act, as amended, will continue to reduce the emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides over time. In addition, the five-year, $5 billion joint industry and government clean coal technology program, recently endorsed by the current administration, also would greatly reduce sulfur and nitrogen oxides emissions nationwide. These emerging coal technologies will make coal an even more attractive energy resource for power generation and other industrial uses.

Despite our nation's present environmental laws, the administration's support for clean coal technology and existing scientific uncertainty over the causes and effects of acid deposition, Congress is currently considering acid deposition control programs that would require additional emission reductions in sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. Most of these emission reduction plans would severely affect the production of coal and generation of electricity within the southern states. The emission reduction programs would cause unemployment, job displacement and would constrain economic growth while providing questionable environmental benefits to the southern states. Such impacts would not be shared equally among other regions of the nation.
Most objectionable to the southern states are those congressional proposals that would impose a cap on emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides on a state-by-state basis regardless of whether a state is actually contributing to the problem. These caps discriminate against those states and industries that are currently taking steps to improve air quality. Such a policy also imposes a severe constraint on the ability of southern economies to continue to grow in the future.

Recommendation:

The Southern Legislative Conference encourages the federal government to expand and accelerate significantly research and monitoring to determine, with acceptable scientific certainty, how acid deposition is created and the extent of aquatic and terrestrial damage directly related to acid deposition.

The federal government and industry also should actively promote and seek proper funding for a clean coal technology program designed to further reduce emissions of atmospheric pollutants further and to enhance the use of the nation's predominant domestic energy resource, coal.

All legislative endeavors should be directed toward ensuring that necessary research is conducted and that clean coal technologies are developed in an expeditious manner. Acid deposition legislation should not be considered until and unless scientific evidence substantiates the need for such measures. Furthermore, the Southern Legislative Conference should monitor the acid deposition debate closely to ensure that regional inequities do not occur that:

- restrict growth in the southern states and reduce the ability of the southern states to continue to move toward the use of local coal as a primary fuel in electric generating facilities and major industrial installations;

- require interim reductions in the emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides or other air pollutants in the southern states beyond those required under current environmental laws and new combustion technology implementation; and
unfairly burden the southern states with increased unemployment, higher electric utility rates and other economic dislocations that result from a costly and inequitable emissions reduction program.

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