What conclusion should we draw from the drubbing that California gave to Prop. 23, the ballot measure that would have overturned our landmark Global Warming Solutions Act? Andrew Leonard at Salon applauds our voters for affirming "their commitment to tackling the challenge of climate change and our dependence on fossil fuels." But Sean, in his birdseye view of what the election means overall for the environment, is a bit more skeptical. I think I'm with Sean on this one.

Determining voter intent is, of course, a complicated matter but one of the stunning features of the No on 23 campaign was its utter lack of attention to the fact that Prop. 23 would have suspended California's *climate change* legislation. Instead, the campaign — smartly, I acknowledge — focused on three points:

That the money behind the Prop. 23 came from Texas oil companies (or "Texas Oil Barons", as the No on 23 website proclaims);

That Prop. 23 would jeopardize public health and worsen air pollution; and

That Prop. 23 would destroy clean energy jobs.

The No on 23 website says nothing about climate change. None of the ads that the No campaign ran even mentioned climate change or global warming.

Check out some of the videos for the No campaign and you'll see firsthand what I mean. Here's David Arquette "fighting to free himself from the grips of Texas oil companies." [youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wo1wNpza2rM]

Here's the American Lung Association decrying the negative health effects of Prop 23, with images of polluting oil refineries in California owned by Texas oil companies. [youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eEmXlJ-Gts&feature=player_embedded]

And here's an ad saying that Prop. 23 threatens 500,000 clean energy jobs: [youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpbYmOVFdSo&feature=player_embedded]

The No on 23 campaign was incredibly effective: more than 60 percent of California voters voted No on the initiative. But the campaign did what many effective campaigns do. It slightly (and even sometimes blatantly) distorted reality — arguments that the initiative would roll back California's landmark air pollution laws struck me as disingenous at best — in 60 second, effective ads bankrolled by three

times as much money as the Yes campaign spent.

I’m thrilled with the outcome of the Prop. 23 campaign. And I think the defeat of the initiative gives impetus to the state’s air board and legislature to continue California’s tradition of environmental leadership. But given the campaign that No on 23 ran, it’s hard to give Californians a lot of credit for embracing climate change reform.