Gov. Jerry Brown’s commitment to climate-change action is showing gaps. The toasts and cheers that greeted a breakthrough agreement in Paris to curb climate change were only a start. Now comes the serious work of
ratifying the sweeping plans and making sure the world’s countries stay on track.
At the United Nations, the follow-through is just beginning as diplomats from 171 countries sign the accord reached in December. Some 55 percent will need to formally approve the plan to set the stage for a much bigger step: making countries both rich and poor essentially redesign their economies.
The goals are ambitious and pressing. Left alone, the planet’s energy is on track to boost temperatures, threaten food supplies, raise sea levels and, worst of all, become irreversible by the end of this century.
The Paris pact ends years of dithering and debating by requiring countries to draw up plans that will avoid these perils. There’s reason for both hope and worry as the process plays out.
China, the planet’s top emitter of heat-trapping gases, is pledging to sign on. India is building huge solar farms instead of coal-burning power plants. In this country, a wave of innovation ranging from wind turbines to electric cars is nibbling at the American energy diet. The doomsday measure — a fateful jump of 2 degrees centigrade in average temperature, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit — can be averted if these industrial changes spread. President Obama has pushed the U.S. to do more. By signing the deal, he may be promising more than he can deliver in his final year in office. Efforts to limit fossil fuels and switch to non-polluting sources can be undone — or sustained — by his successor.
Other countries are placing their bets on the success of the the Paris deal by watching the presidential race. Both Democrats — Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders — accept climate change as a threat and back the global pact. But GOP frontrunners Donald Trump and Ted Cruz aren’t sold. Another indicator may come when a Supreme Court seat is filled, one that could tip a decision on legal challenges to a clean-air plan that aims to limit power plant emissions.
California Gov. Jerry Brown has talked a good game about engaging local communities in the effort, but he has remained oddly silent about a wrongheaded idea that undermines his words in every way: a proposal to ship millions of tons of coal every year through a new Oakland port facility. After all, emissions from a coal plant in China are every bit as destructive to the planet as those burned in the United States.
Memo to the governor: Defense of principles begins at home.
It’s time for leaders around the globe and in this state to show leadership on a major threat.