

Environment & Energy

California Revives Climate Push in Legislature's Final Week

By Zach Bright

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- Newsom wants carbon neutrality by 2045 codified
 - Would cement goals beyond executive orders
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Gov. Gavin Newsom and California lawmakers are breathing new life into old bills in an eleventh-hour push for climate policy with just a week left in the state's legislative session.

Newsom (D) wants to codify a state target to become carbon neutral by or before 2045. He's eyeing a more aggressive greenhouse gas target for 2030 and stronger clean energy pathway. The governor also is seeking community protections from oil and gas well pollution.

From those priorities, draft legislation has emerged that would cement climate goals in a way that Newsom's executive orders and administrative directives cannot.

"We're taking all of these major actions now in the most aggressive push on climate this state has ever seen because later is too late," Newsom said in a statement.

One measure, A.B. 1395, was recently revived to enshrine the state's carbon neutrality goal set by former Gov. Jerry Brown's executive order. It was unable to clear the state Senate in 2021.

Another target-setting bill, A.B. 2133, has been amended to require the state's top air regulator—the California Air Resources Board—to ensure that statewide greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to 55% below the 1990 levels by the end of 2030.

Trade groups including the California Business Roundtable and California Chamber of Commerce have criticized the sudden pushes, noting the yearlong process the California Air Resources Board has taken to develop its emissions reduction plan.

"Rushing policies that will impact every aspect of California's trillion-dollar economy through the Legislature at the end of session and without time for a thorough debate addressing reliability, affordability and equity is the wrong approach," those groups, joined by others, said in a statement.

Energy Efforts

To boost clean energy and minimize uncertainty from California's grid, lawmakers will hold a special Senate hearing Thursday to debate proposals. Newsom wants to keep Diablo Canyon, the state's last operational nuclear plant, running.

Draft legislation from the governor's office would loan as much as \$1.4 billion to keep the site from closing as planned in 2025, to continue providing near zero-emission energy. The Diablo plant provides more than 8% of the state's electricity supply.

Some Democratic lawmakers oppose the idea, offering an alternative that would fund different clean energy projects and promote energy and efficiency for low-income Californians. It's the preferred choice for some environmental groups and anti-nuclear advocates.

Newsom is pushing for legislation to create a 3,200-foot setback distance requirement between schools or homes and new oil and gas wells. Pollution controls for existing wells would also be strengthened.

Previous legislative attempts to create similar community protections were defeated by oil and gas industry groups.

"The building trades have really developed kind of a marriage with the oil and gas industry," said Mary Creasman, CEO of California Environmental Voters. "And that has created a gridlock in Sacramento with moderate Democrat and Republican partnering on this thing."

A bill to fund oil well cleanup and transition for operations in Long Beach, A.B. 353, awaits Newsom's signature.

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