

# After historic year of environmental laws, California wants to go further

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California's Democratic supermajority wants to follow up its most ambitious year of environmental legislation by passing new clean energy incentives and measures that would accelerate greenhouse gas reductions

and require billion-dollar businesses to disclose their emissions.

On the cusp of becoming the world's fourth-largest economy, California could influence global climate policy if it passes this new suite of legislation and other [states](#) and countries follow suit, the bills' authors argued earlier this month. They spoke at a gathering of hundreds of [environmental activists](#), clean energy industry officials and other leaders in Sacramento for the California Climate Policy Summit.

"We need to address the urgency of climate change," said Democratic Assemblymember Rick Chavez Zbur. "We need to do it to protect our kids, for our planet."

Zbur, who was an environmental lawyer for the better part of three decades before taking office in December, has introduced several pieces of legislation this session. One would require state agencies to boost offshore wind energy development, while another would require cities and counties to amend their local general plans (state-required blueprints for long-term development) to meet California's greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Many of these measures face opposition from Republican lawmakers and the state's petroleum industry leaders, who argue the bills will increase energy costs and eliminate jobs.

Assembly Republican Leader James Gallagher said a measure enacted last month that aims to root out and penalize price gouging by oil companies could lead to gas shortages, rationing and price spikes, disrupting California's energy market.

"Democrats have spent years driving up the cost of gas with a steady stream of taxes, fees and regulations," he said in a statement. "This bill is no different."

The new legislation comes just months after Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law measures that committed California to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, invested \$6.1 billion in zero-emission vehicles and created a pathway for the state's electrical grid to be fueled by clean energy over the next two decades.

A law that would have banned new oil and gas wells within 3,200 feet of homes, hospitals and schools is on hold until voters consider a ballot measure in 2024 to overturn the law. The state's petroleum industry sponsored the ballot measure, arguing the law threatens jobs and gas prices.

As [global temperatures](#) rise and many low-income communities choke on toxic pollutants, the state must implement ambitious, bold policies that clean water and air, phase out fossil fuels and invest in clean energy, argued Ellie Cohen, chief executive officer at the Climate Center, a Santa Rosa, California-based nonprofit that tracks and advocates for these laws and hosted the event.

"The good news is that we have the solutions," she said. "We know what we need to do. We know how to achieve equitable accelerated climate policy. We just need the political will."

Though this past year was "the biggest year ever in California for climate legislation," the state must keep pushing the envelope if it's going to be a global leader in climate policies, said Democratic state Sen. Josh Becker.

Becker chairs the Senate Budget Subcommittee on Resources, Environmental Protection and Energy, which will hear several of these measures. He is also sponsoring legislation that would provide incentives for solar energy systems integrated into canopies over parking lots and driveways.

But even with Democrats holding a supermajority in California, it is difficult to pass these measures, he added. Earlier this month, he said he had to water down legislation on building performance standards by taking out any requirements for new residential units. He blamed the petroleum industry and business groups for standing in the way of stronger legislation.

"It is a battle every day up here," he said.

Indeed, the California Chamber of Commerce has come out against several measures Democrats introduced this session, including a bill that would prohibit the construction of new or expanded warehouses within 1,000 feet of homes, schools, day care centers, hospitals and other sensitive areas.

The chamber said the bill was a "job killer" and a "de facto ban of warehouses." The chamber also came out against bills that would set new greenhouse gas reduction levels and target gas-powered vehicles, calling the goals "arbitrary."

The Sacramento-based Western States Petroleum Industry also opposed the March law aimed at price gouging by oil companies. Catherine Reheis-Boyd, the organization's president, said in a statement last month that the state should have a "serious discussion" about affordable energy instead of targeting price gouging.

"Price caps, taxes, and tax-like penalties do not increase supply or reduce prices, but instead can have the opposite effect—less investment, less gasoline supply, and ultimately higher costs for Californians," she said.

This session is the third time that Democratic Assembly Majority Leader Eloise Gomez Reyes is attempting to pass the warehouse measure. People of color in her community of San Bernardino and the Central

Valley are hurt by the air pollution and poor roads created by warehouses and the diesel trucks coming in and out of the area, she said.

"It's a question of public health, and it's a question of quality of life," she said. "We have to have guardrails."

Reyes also is sponsoring a measure that would fund projects that develop zero-emission fuel and vehicle technologies. The bill also would require these projects to help low-income and disadvantaged communities.

While Newsom and lawmakers have established ambitious climate goals for reduced greenhouse gas emissions, several lawmakers expressed concern that the technology and infrastructure doesn't yet exist to meet those benchmarks.

With that in mind, Democratic state Sen. Nancy Skinner introduced a bill this year that would require any new electric vehicle, or EV, sold in California starting in 2027 to be equipped with bidirectional charging capability, meaning it can serve as a backup battery for a home during power outages.

Owners of EVs with that capability also could use them to lower their electricity bills during peak rate seasons, Skinner said.

"Why would you waste that battery?" she asked. "Why buy a battery pack for your house when your EV can do it?"

It's still early in the legislative session, so most of the dozens of new environmental bills are still being considered in committee. But lawmakers and climate activists are optimistic they can get many of them to Newsom's desk.

"We can dramatically cut climate pollution, we can start phasing out

[fossil fuels](#), we can vastly increase the deployment of solar and wind," said Cohen of the Climate Center. "There is no other option."

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