

OIL AND GAS

Fracking ban fizzles out in Calif. Legislature

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California lawmakers yesterday rejected a bill that would have banned hydraulic fracturing in the state, succumbing to pressure from the powerful oil and gas industry and its labor union allies who warned the bill would have cost well-paying jobs.

The bill was inspired in part by California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D), who last year announced the state would ban the sale of all new gas-powered cars by 2035. He also called on the state Legislature to ban new permits for fracking, a technique to extract oil and gas embedded in rock deep beneath the surface.

Two Democratic state senators — Scott Wiener from San Francisco and Monique Limón from Santa Barbara — introduced legislation earlier this year that would have banned fracking by 2027. They later changed the bill to ban fracking by 2035.

But it wasn't enough to win over some of their Democratic colleagues, who could not muster enough votes yesterday to advance the bill out of committee. The bill needed five votes to advance, but it only got four. Democratic Sen. Susan Eggman of Stockton joined two Republicans in voting against the bill, while two other Democrats — Robert Hertzberg of Van Nuys and Ben Hueso of Logan Heights — did not vote.

"There is a large stain on California's climate record, and that is oil," Wiener said during a committee hearing yesterday.

Aside from banning fracking and other similar oil extraction methods, the bill would have also imposed a 2,500-foot buffer between oil wells and places like homes and hospitals. It would have set up a state program designed to encourage companies to hire laid-off oil and gas workers to help clean up closed wells.

But those jobs wouldn't pay as well as the oil and gas jobs they would replace, said Rudy Gonzalez, secretary-treasurer of the San Francisco Building and Construction Trades Council.

"Our blue-collar workers can't afford this right now," he said.

Opponents noted that California heavily regulates the oil and gas industry to make sure it extracts oil safely. Banning the practice would not reduce California's dependence on oil, driven by the tens of millions of gas-powered cars and trucks on the state's roads, requiring it to import more oil from other places.

"We're still going to use it, but we're going to use it from places that produce it less safely," Eggman said. She added that she supports transitioning the state away from oil and gas, but cautioned: "I don't think we're quite there yet, and this bill assumes that we are."

Yesterday's vote means the proposal likely won't pass the Legislature this year. But in a joint statement after the hearing, Wiener and Limón said they are not giving up.

"This issue isn't going away," they said. "We'll continue to fight for aggressive climate action, against harmful drilling and for the health of our communities." — *Adam Beam, Associated Press*

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