

Cap-and-trade skeptic Perea exits alternative energy panel

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By Jeremy B. White

It would have made for a delicate situation: a panel on California's alternative energy future, featuring a state Assembly member who has been vocally questioning part of the state's landmark emissions-reducing program.

No longer. Averting a potentially awkward scenario, Assemblyman **Henry Perea**, D-Fresno, withdrew from a panel discussion planned as part of an alternative energy trade group's Sacramento summit. Perea cited a scheduling conflict, according to a spokeswoman for Advanced Energy Economy.

California's cap-and-trade program has been a contentious topic lately. Lauded by environmentalists and many California Democrats for its groundbreaking plan to reduce carbon emissions, the first-in-the-nation effort requires industry to purchase permits for the greenhouse gases they put into the air.

So far, producers of transportation fuels like gasoline have not been included. But that is about to change, prompting pushback and warnings about higher prices at the pump. Perea has led the charge, floating a bill to forestall including gas for a few years. A group of moderate Democrats have rallied to the cause.

Perea has said he supports the cap-and-trade program's overall goal of reducing emissions. But he argues a spike in gas prices would be onerous for residents of his district and others across the Central Valley, where unemployment hovers above the statewide rate.

On Wednesday morning Perea's office pointed to a letter from the Legislative Analysts Office suggesting gasoline prices could rise by between 13 cents to 20 cents a gallon, with the possibility of price bumps exceeding 50 cents a gallon. Perea said the results justify his bill.

There is widespread agreement that including transportation fuels in the Cap-and-Trade program will increase the retail price of gasoline, Perea said in a statement. This is why I authored Assembly Bill (AB) 69- so the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and the Legislature can have a practical policy debate and explore ways to provide relief to consumers who can't afford gas hikes.

Other lawmakers expected to speak on the panel Perea has left include incoming Senate leader **Kevin de León**, D-Los Angeles, and Sen. **Fran Pavley**, D-Agoura Hills, who authored the bill enacting the cap-and-trade program. Both signed a letter urging Gov. **Jerry Brown** to stay the course and allow gasoline to come under cap-and-trade on schedule.

Also on the agenda is Air Resources Board **Mary Nichols**, whose organization implements the cap-and-trade program, speaking with billionaire environmental activist **Tom Steyer**. Steyer has pledged to spend money fighting the delay sought by Perea and others.

A representative from Perea's office did not return messages seeking comment.

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