

# Sides square off over climate change proposals by California Democrats

By Chris Megerian

LOCAL CALIFORNIA



Senate leader Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles), pictured here in August, said Tuesday that environmental regulations could spur innovation and help California's economy transition away from fossil fuels. (Rich Pedroncelli / Associated Press)

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Utilities and other business groups view California climate change proposals with skepticism

The release of climate change proposals by Senate Democrats on Tuesday quickly spawned a heated debate over the direction of California's economy and the potential effect of new environmental regulations.

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Some unions and companies welcome the legislation, saying it will lead to new jobs and foster a growing market in clean energy technologies. But oil companies, utilities and other business groups viewed the proposals with skepticism, if not outright hostility.

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"This is not going to be easy," said Kathryn Phillips, director of Sierra Club California. "There will be a lot of negotiation."

The proposals largely reflect goals set by Gov. Jerry Brown during his inaugural address last month. One bill would require stricter limits on greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and another would require greater energy efficiency in older buildings, expanded generation of renewable energy and reduced gasoline use on state roads by 2030.

Other bills would create an advisory committee on job growth and order state pension systems, the two largest public pension funds in the country, to divest from coal companies.

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During Tuesday's news conference outside the Capitol, Senate leader Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles) said environmental regulations could spur innovation and help California's economy transition away from fossil fuels.

"My Senate colleagues and I have seen clean energy jobs growing across California, and we want to make sure they reach every single district," De León said.

Sen. Ben Hueso (D-San Diego) described it as "the California gold rush of the modern era."

It's a pitch intended to win over Democrats worried about the effect of new legislation on the economy.

"It will be a tough lift," said Assemblyman Anthony Rendon (D-Lakewood), who joined De León on Tuesday to show his support. "People have concerns about dependability. People have concerns about costs. We take all of those concerns very seriously."

A coalition of oil companies reiterated their opposition to the "radical" goal of reducing gasoline use 50% by 2030, describing the Senate proposals as "attacks on an important industry." In addition, utility companies have circulated an alternative energy proposal, and some business groups questioned the potential effect of higher electricity prices.

"The jobs you lose in manufacturing could outweigh the jobs you gain in the clean, emerging economy," said Dorothy Rothrock, president of the California Manufacturers & Technology Assn.

If the Senate proposals are enacted, meeting the targets will be left up to state agencies responsible for drafting and enforcing new policies. Assemblyman James Gallagher (R-Nicolaus) said that reduces accountability, and he's pushing legislation to give lawmakers the final word on regulations.

"Shouldn't we have some say in it?" Gallagher said.

De León disagreed, saying that would "politicize" the regulatory process.

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