

Gov. Brown revives Manuel Pérez's renewable energy plan

Tatiana Sanchez, *The Desert Sun* 5:05 p.m. PST January 5, 2015



(Photo: AP)

A locally authored plan to dramatically increase the state's renewable energy goals is regaining momentum, as part of a series of ambitious goals California Gov. Jerry Brown wants to achieve in the next 15 years.

Brown, who delivered his inaugural address on Monday, called on California to increase the amount of electricity derived from renewable sources from one-third to 50 percent.

The plan mirrors a 2013 proposal championed by then-Assemblyman V. Manuel Pérez, a Coachella Democrat who outlined an aggressive agenda to kick up California's renewable energy goal to 51 percent by 2030 and require utilities to base purchases of renewable power not only on cost, but each project's impact on greenhouse gas emissions and grid reliability.

Pérez's idea, penned as Assembly Bill 177, was all but gutted of its strongest provisions during committee hearings, following widespread opposition from business groups, utilities and even some renewable energy developers and trade groups.

Despite the previous opposition, Coachella Valley political leaders on Monday said Brown's proposal would be a natural fit for a region known for promoting and adapting the use of renewable energy.

Though the plan is ambitious, Pérez said "it's a matter of political will."

"It's an awesome challenge. I know that we'll have to be mindful of costs, of needs when it comes to infrastructure and making sure that our rates are affordable for folks," Pérez, now a Coachella councilman, told *The Desert Sun*. "But I also know the green economy in our area is a real one, especially as it pertains to the Salton Sea."

Brown's plan to increase the state's reliance on renewable energy — a plan that earned applause during Monday's speech to the Legislature — is one of several goals the governor outlined related to climate change and the environment.

Brown also urged California to slash its use of petroleum in cars and trucks by up to 50 percent, and "double the efficiency of existing buildings and make heating fuels cleaner."

"We must also reduce the relentless release of methane, black carbon and other potent pollutants across industries," Brown said in his address.

"We must manage farm and rangelands, forests and wetlands so they can store carbon. All of this is a very tall order. It means that we continue to transform our electrical grid, our transportation system and even our communities."

Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia, a Coachella Democrat, said Brown's plan to increase the renewable energy standards is "something that resonates with us in the Coachella

(Valley) and Imperial Valley.”

“It’s a perfect opportunity to continue to create jobs and become a greener California,” Garcia said.

State Sen. Jeff Stone said it would be a challenge to fulfill the goal in just 15 years, but that he’s “very supportive” of the plan.

“I’m very supportive of this very ambitious goal and I think that we have the tools to help embark on accomplishing that goal,” said Stone, a Temecula Republican who represents the Coachella Valley.

“We live in a county that is an example of alternative energy.”

Assemblyman Chad Mayes’ office declined to comment on Brown’s renewable energy proposal.

But in a statement about the entire address, Mayes — a Yucca Valley Republican who represents parts of the desert — said that “like Governor Brown, I’m hopeful that Republicans and Democrats alike will come together and tackle the challenges we have before us.”

Pérez had pulled AB 177 from consideration in early 2014, after it became clear the Legislature wouldn’t endorse it by the deadline to pass bills.

“I definitely think that we were before our time when it came to this bill,” Pérez said after Brown’s address on Monday. “I know we had a lot of support, but we also had a lot of opposition.”