

Gov. Brown signs sweeping legislation to combat climate change



Gov. Jerry Brown signs legislation to advance California's nation-leading efforts to address climate change. See Brown's full speech [here](#).

By Chris Megerian and Liam Dillon

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California will become a petri dish for international efforts to slow global warming under legislation signed by Gov. Jerry Brown on Thursday, forcing one of the world's largest economies to squeeze into a dramatically smaller carbon footprint.

"What we're doing here is farsighted, as well as far-reaching," Brown said at a signing ceremony at Vista Hermosa Natural Park in downtown Los Angeles. "California is doing something that no other state has done."

The legislation, SB 32, requires the state to slash greenhouse gas emissions to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030, a much more ambitious target than the previous goal of hitting 1990 levels by 2020.

Cutting emissions will affect nearly all aspects of life in the state — where people live, how they get to work, how their food is produced and where their electricity comes from.



[The political debate over climate change in California](#)

“We’re going to have to make the change about three times as fast as we’ve done so far,” said James Sweeney, director of the Precourt Energy Efficiency Center at [Stanford University](#).

The state has already been ramping up solar power generation, handing out subsidies for drivers to buy electric cars and prodding developers to create denser communities connected to mass transit.

But research from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory shows that current policies may get the state only about halfway to the 2030 goal. Right now the state is inching closer to 1990 emissions levels, a target set a decade ago by an earlier law.

That means Californians can expect to feel more of what Brown has called the “coercive power of government.” Businesses will likely face more restrictive rules, and taxpayer and ratepayer money will be needed to subsidize cleaner technologies.

“You name it, we’re going to need it,” said Snuller Price, senior partner at E3, an energy efficiency consulting firm that has worked with state regulators.

Reaching the goal set by SB 32 could be a difficult task in a growing state. California has 38 million people now, with a gross domestic product of almost \$2.5 trillion, making it the sixth-largest economy in the world.

By 2030, estimates from the Public Policy Institute of California and the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy show, the state could have 44 million people and an economy of nearly \$3.5 trillion, but carbon emissions would need to be dramatically reduced.

The effort will require not only policies and innovations to make clean technology more available and affordable, but political acumen to prevent a public backlash to those policies.

"Whatever it's going to take, it's going to take battle, it's going to take wisdom and it will take some balance that we don't overdo it," Brown said. "But I'm not afraid that we're going to get to that point."

Some business groups have already raised concerns. Allan Zaremberg, president of the state's Chamber of Commerce, said the law doesn't require "regulatory agencies to give any consideration to the impacts on our economy, disruptions in everyone's daily lives or the fact that California's population will grow."

Perhaps the biggest challenge is getting more clean cars on the roads, a key issue in a sprawling state where residents can face long commutes to work.

Despite subsidies, Californians aren't buying electric cars fast enough to help the state meet its target of reducing emissions to 40% below 1990 levels. And every gasoline-powered car purchased today could remain on the road for years to come, further undermining climate goals.

Chris Busch, research director at Energy Innovation, a San Francisco-based think tank, said more charging stations could help drivers feel more confident about ditching gasoline.

"We need to be rolling out the infrastructure quickly," he said.

Shawn Yadon, CEO of the California Trucking Assn., said businesses are spending heavily to comply with existing emissions regulations, and the new law will only exacerbate their costs.

"It's very clear that it's going to require new tech and new fuels," he said.

The agricultural industry could also feel the pinch of new regulations, and the state probably will need to slash methane emissions from dairy production and landfills. Methane is about 80 times more powerful a climate pollutant in the long term than carbon dioxide.

Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon (D-Paramount) said the state won't be able to rely on easy fixes to make more progress. "It's no longer the low-hanging fruit," Rendon said of the state making progress toward its goal. "We're going to have to attack it more vigorously."

The deep changes needed to hit the new emissions goal have prompted Sweeney to question whether it will be possible.

"I frankly doubt whether California is going to meet those targets," he said. "But I hope that they can."

It's an effort that will be closely watched around the U.S. and the world. California has often set benchmarks for environmental programs, and environmental leaders said they hope other places will follow suit.

"California is becoming the world's leader in the reduction of climate pollution," said Daniel Weiss, a clean energy consultant in Washington, D.C. "Its aggressive stance will help drive innovation and adoption of clean energy policies in other places."



Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella) and Sen. Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills), who worked together on climate legislation, shook hands at Thursday's event. (Liz O. Baylen / Los Angeles Times)

A second measure signed Thursday by the governor, AB 197, shifts the trajectory of the state's environmental policies. It creates a legislative committee to oversee regulators, giving lawmakers more say in how climate goals are met. It pushes the state to take stronger steps to curb local pollution, rather than simply seeking a statewide reduction in emissions.

"Our climate change policies, I think today and by the signing of these two bills, represent a turning of the page as it relates to focusing on people," said Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella), who wrote the measure.

The legislation does not specifically address the future of the cap-and-trade program, the centerpiece of California's climate agenda. The program requires companies to buy permits to release emissions into the atmosphere, creating a financial incentive to clean up operations.

Cap and trade has raised billions of dollars in recent years, but revenue from the program has slowed to a trickle, and it's facing legal uncertainty from a years-long legal battle over whether the program amounts to an unconstitutional tax.



Gov. Jerry Brown joins legislative, environmental, business and community leaders in Los Angeles to sign SB 32 by Sen. Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills) and AB 197 by Assemblyman Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella). (Liz O. Baylen / Los Angeles Times)

After the new legislation was approved by lawmakers last month, Brown said he would have additional leverage to persuade businesses to support an extension of cap and trade. Otherwise, he said, the state would have to rely on less flexible policies to reach its emissions goals.

Brown said Thursday that he hoped California's efforts would help change the minds of Republicans and businesses that have resisted climate policies.

"I don't want to be partisan, but these guys deny science," he said. "Anybody who lies like that should not be listened to. That's all."

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