

Focus on CALIFORNIA: Newsom Puts His Foot on the Gas

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Sammy Roth – The Boiling Point

Gov. Gavin Newsom has never hesitated to go to bat for electric vehicles.

Even as slowing sales growth and former President Trump's reelection have called into question the feasibility of California meeting its aggressive clean car targets — a topic The Times' Russ Mitchell explored in [one of his latest stories](#) — Newsom has continued supporting EVs. Last week, his Public Utilities Commission approved [\\$1.4 billion](#) for EV charging stations and other clean transportation projects, Utility Dive's Robert Walton reports.

“With this investment, and the help of the private sector, we're building a bigger, better vehicle charging network that ensures Californians can reliably and affordably get where they're going,” Newsom said in a [news release](#).

It's important stuff. We need emission-free cars to cut air pollution and slow the climate crisis. And California has had great success: In the third quarter of this year, [26.4% of new cars](#) sold in the state were zero-emission.

Still, I wonder: Why hasn't the governor dedicated the same political capital to electric heating and cooking? Why hasn't he fought as hard to get natural gas out of our homes as he has to get gasoline out of our cars?

To be clear, oil is a bigger contributor to climate change than natural gas. Transportation [accounted for](#) 39% of the state's heat-trapping carbon emissions last year, compared with 14% for residential and commercial buildings.

But as I [wrote last week](#), Newsom has at times talked a big game on gas.

He pledged early in his first term that he would try to shut down Aliso Canyon — an L.A.-area facility that stores gas for use in homes, businesses and electric plants — by 2027. Aliso sprang a record leak in 2015, spewing heat-trapping methane into the atmosphere and releasing toxic chemicals into L.A.'s Porter Ranch neighborhood.

Despite Newsom's pledge, there's been little progress toward closing Aliso. The governor's appointees are slated to vote Thursday on a plan that would probably keep it open into the 2030s — with no clear closure timeline.

The problem isn't that Newsom has done nothing to help Californians ditch gas. Far from it.

When I asked Terrie Prosper, a spokesperson for the California Public Utilities Commission, what the agency has done to cut gas demand, she pointed to [several programs](#) that have collectively resulted in the approval of \$168 million in incentives for 75,000 electric space-and-water heaters (with hundreds of millions of dollars more yet to be approved). She also noted that the commission [eliminated utility subsidies](#) for new buildings that burn gas.

Newsom's appointees at the California Energy Commission have taken action too.

Although the agency hasn't banned gas hookups in new homes, disappointing activists, it [voted](#) in September to adopt a new energy code that will incentivize builders to use electric space and water heating in single-family and low-rise multifamily homes starting in 2026. Another agency will probably vote to [finalize](#) the code this week.

In Southern California, meanwhile, a \$71-million settlement between the state and Southern California Gas Co. — which owns and operates Aliso Canyon — should help some residents near the gas storage field go electric.

Forty million dollars will go toward \$1,000 rebates for SoCalGas customers to buy heat pumps, with priority given to residents of Porter Ranch and surrounding neighborhoods, as The Times' Andrew J. Campa [reports](#).

“Thousands of dollars are now available for California homeowners to install heat pumps, making your home more energy-efficient and reducing your energy bills by hundreds of dollars each year,” Newsom said in a recent [news release](#), announcing federal funds from President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. “With these new rebates made possible by the Biden-Harris administration, Californians can save money and take real climate action.”

So it's not like Newsom has shied away from embracing electric appliances

At the same time, he [leaned over the hood of a Ford Mustang Mach-E](#) to sign his electric car mandate. He hasn't done the same thing with an induction stove. He's called the Legislature into special session twice to fight [alleged Big Oil price-gouging](#). He hasn't done anything of the sort to deal with [alleged gas utility price-gouging](#).

It's not hard to surmise there are political factors at play here.

Automakers have invested hundreds of billions of dollars in electric vehicles — and they want those investments to pay off. Newsom, with a presidential run always in mind, knows supporting EVs is a smart move politically. By contrast, there's no powerful, consolidated group of electric appliance companies. There's no Big Heat Pump, no Big Induction. The marketplace is growing but much more dispersed. The campaign funds are minimal.

Another political obstacle: The fossil-fuel industry has turned natural gas into a culture-war issue by bombarding Americans with the message that woke liberals are coming to take away their gas stoves and gas drilling jobs.

Last month, for instance, former Ohio Rep. Tim Ryan, a Democrat, claimed on MSNBC that Democrats lost votes in November because they were too “moderate” on gas. The left-leaning network didn't tell viewers that Ryan is [being paid by a gas industry lobbying group](#), as Heated's Emily Atkin and Arielle Samuelson report.

What gas supporters can't achieve via that kind of messaging, they might accomplish in court.

This month, a self-described “coalition of manufacturers, businesses, affordable housing interests, and workers” [sued](#) Southern California's main air quality regulator over a rule requiring homes and businesses to replace more than 1 million gas appliances — including an estimated 700,000 pool heaters and 300,000 tankless water heaters, as my colleague Tony Briscoe [reported earlier this year](#) — with electric appliances over the next three decades.

Trump's inauguration, just a month away, adds more uncertainty. The Trump administration could try to roll back federal incentives for home heat pumps and other electric appliances, as Akielly Hu [reports for Canary Media](#).

Will Newsom make phasing out gas appliances a bigger part of his climate platform as he prepares for a possible 2028 presidential run? Or will he stay focused on electric cars, knowing it's easier to rile people up about gasoline prices than about gas utility bills, and he'll win more friends promoting EVs than castigating gas stoves?

Probably the latter.

Then again, the environmental group Food and Water Action announced Monday that it's spending at least \$100,000 to air TV and YouTube ads in four Democratic presidential primary states — Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire and South Carolina — [slamming](#)

[Newsom](#) for failing to close Aliso Canyon. It's an early attempt to make primary voters question whether Newsom is a true climate leader willing to take on Trump and fossil fuel companies.

Will the ad change Newsom's political calculus on Aliso? No idea.

But I do know this: The biggest barriers to climate action aren't economic or technological. They're political.

Per a new report, the state slashed its heat-trapping pollution by an average of [2.5% annually between 2018 and 2022](#), KQED's Laura Klivans writes. That's real progress. But experts say the pace of reduction needs to accelerate to 4% annually through 2030 to meet the state's emissions target — and Trump will only make things harder.

Case in point: In a wide-ranging deregulation wish list, industry groups are urging Trump to resume natural gas exports, relax limits on soot pollution and “forever” chemicals, pause implementation of worker heat protections and repeal coal- and gas-plant emission rules. [Details here](#) from my colleagues Susanne Rust and Ian James.

The U.S. Supreme Court might create challenges too:

- The justices have agreed to take up a case that could ultimately threaten California's authority to set its own auto-emissions rules, [and thus the state's electric-vehicle mandate](#). (David G. Savage, L.A. Times)
- Even liberal justices sound ready to [rein in the National Environmental Policy Act](#). (David G. Savage)