



State Senator Michael Rubio
will be cooking with gas at
Chevron

With the news that CEQA “reform” champion and State Senator Michael Rubio [resigned today](#) to lobby for Chevron, I have to wonder if his push for CEQA reform was really just to benefit oil and gas fracking. Sure, CEQA reform proponents liked to trumpet how a weakening of the law will help businesses and infill development and the like, but the reality was that the [standards-based reform effort](#) that Rubio and others advocated would primarily have benefited large sprawl projects — and of course the fracking industry, based in Rubio’s district in Kern County. Certainly there is not a lot of infill development happening in Kern County right now to motivate the former State Senator to champion reform for that outcome. And not only is Rubio an interested party in the oil and gas industry, but Tina Thomas, the lawyer who worked with Rubio to draft his CEQA reform legislation, counts Chevron as [one of her clients](#).

So why would fracking proponents care to push for changes to CEQA? Currently, California and the United States do not have regulations in place to address fracking, and CEQA has been largely ignored when it comes to this extraction process. But in 2011, California Department of Conservation employees who review permits for new fracking projects (correctly) argued that CEQA review should apply to these projects. In response, the Brown Administration promptly [fired them](#). But with the law on the side of CEQA proponents, companies like Chevron had to know that California’s premiere environmental law would delay and possibly limit their fracking projects. That’s where Thomas and Rubio came in, joined by longstanding business critics of CEQA.

I hate to be cynical about the reform effort, and there certainly are good reasons to reform CEQA in sensible ways. But we need better environmental outcomes in this state, not worse ones. And allowing fracking supporters to rewrite environmental laws strikes me as a bad thing for the state from the get-go. In a way, we can now thank Senator Rubio for bringing his true interests to the public’s attention with this surprising news.