

One of 2016's biggest political battles in California is over whether and how the state will pursue its ambitious climate change mitigation goals past the year 2020. California's landmark Global Warming Solutions Act—better known as AB 32—committed California to roll back aggregate state greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels no later than 2020. Through the aggressive efforts of former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, current Governor Jerry Brown and the California Air Resources Board, AB 32's statutory goals will in fact be achieved.

But the \$64,000 question is: what happens after 2020?

Governor Brown and CARB take the position that AB 32 authorizes them to pursue even more aggressive GHG reduction strategies and results post-2020. But some members of the regulated community—most prominently the oil and gas industry—strongly disagree.

Meanwhile, the State of California is currently defending a formidable legal challenge to one of the key elements of the state's current, multifaceted efforts to reduce GHG emissions: the cap-and-trade program administered by CARB.

As the California Legislature this month sprints to the finish of its 2016 session, Governor Brown and environmental legislators led by State Senator Fran Pavley are pushing new legislation—[SB 32](#)—that gives the Governor and CARB explicit authority to ratchet state GHG emissions substantially *below* 2020 levels by the year 2030. Specifically, SB 32 would require CARB to cap statewide GHG emissions at 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. But SB 32 is facing stout resistance from Republican legislators, as well as a number of moderate, “business friendly” Democrats. (That coalition, influenced by oil and gas industry lobbying, handed Governor Brown a rare legislative and environmental defeat in 2015.)

Governor Brown has apparently concluded that enough is enough. The Los Angeles Times today reports that Brown is initiating long-term efforts to place an initiative measure on California's 2018 ballot that would ask state voters to themselves extend and strengthen California's GHG reduction efforts in the decade between 2020 and 2030.

Presumably, Governor Brown would only pursue his 2018 initiative if the California Legislature refuses to enact SB 32 in the waning days of this year's legislative session or comparable legislation in 2017. But it's no idle threat: polls published by the Public Policy Institute of California and others indicate that ongoing state GHG reduction efforts—including the current cap-and-trade program—are popular and supported by most Californians.

Senator Fran Pavley, an environmental icon who authored AB 32 a decade ago, is currently

fighting her final environmental battle, championing SB 32 this year; she's termed out of the California Legislature at the end of 2016. Speaking of term limits, Jerry Brown-whose popularity among California voters remains sky-high-is himself termed out at the end of 2018. Brown's launching of his 2018 initiative proposal represents his drawing a key political line in the sand. Brown is obviously willing to commit his considerable prestige and political influence to what would be his own, final political battle over California climate change policy via the ballot-if the state Legislature remains recalcitrant this year and next.

Here's hoping that Brown's newest political gambit induces the California Legislature to do the right thing and send SB 32 to the Governor's desk this fall or, at the latest, enact a similar bill in 2017. If not, it seems likely that Governor Brown will find success with California voters in 2018 and, via the ballot box, get his 2030 GHG reduction mandate across the political finish line.