

Proposal to Change New Jersey's Self-Serve Gas Law Fuels Debate



New Jersey is one of just two states to require full-service gas pumps -- something a key association in the state hopes to change. Problem is, a prominent lawmaker is fighting new legislation tooth and nail. Who will run out of fuel first?

Full-service gas is such a fact of life in the Garden State that [a popular slogan there](#) claims that “Jersey girls don’t pump gas.”

Not that everyone wants it that way anymore. Convenience store groups are making the push to get the state to overturn its 1949 full-service gas requirement -- the kind of law that was shelved in other states more than a generation ago.

Convenience stores once supported the law, but now they’re ready for change -- especially since just one other state, Oregon, has a similar law these days. (Oregon [is looking to loosen its ban](#) at the moment, a change that younger residents [strongly support](#).)

There’s just one problem: New Jersey Senate President Steve Sweeney wants to keep full-service gas around, and he’s the guy who brings the bills to the floor in the chamber. This week, a bill to change the requirement came up once again, only for the Democratic leader to say he won’t bring it to the floor as long as he is Senate president.

So much for that.

“When it’s snowing, no one is clamoring to pump their own gas. When it’s raining, no one is clamoring to pump their own gas,” Sweeney said, [according to NewsWorks](#). “When it’s 15 degrees out, no one is clamoring to pump their own gas.”

Fuel Signals On

Even so, the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store, and Automotive Association is making its case for change. The group’s executive director, Sal Risalvato, explained why the group used to support the full-service gas requirement.

“[T]he landscape of the gasoline service station industry was vastly different then, with big oil companies owning and operating many retail locations, and possessing a distinct [financial] advantage in their ability to transition their stations to accommodate a self-serve option,” [Risalvato said in a news release](#) [PDF]. “With the elimination of company-owned locations, gasoline service station owners no longer have to fear this scenario and have embraced the many benefits that self-serve offers, both to the business owner and the consumer.”

He added that there is a practical reason for moving away from full-service gas as well: The upcoming shift to chip-and-PIN payment systems will require drivers to get out of their cars anyway -- making gas station attendants even more redundant.

“Since I don’t foresee many motorists providing their PIN to a gas station attendant, motorists wishing to use credit are likely going to be getting out of their cars anyway,” he added. “At that point, most would just as well go to the self-serve island, save a few cents a gallon, and pump the gas themselves.”

The public at large is split on the proposal, as reflected by [a pair of competing Newark Star-Ledger](#) editorials.

Will Jersey girls pump gas eventually? Time will tell.