



# N.J. Soon To Be The Only State Where You Can't Pump Your Own Gas

**By: Larry Higgs, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

New Jersey is close to standing alone as the only state in the nation that doesn't allow drivers to pump their own gas, after Oregon lawmakers voted to end that state's ban on self-serve gas.

Does this mean that people in New Jersey could soon pump their own gas, contrary to what the boardwalk T-shirts say?

New attention has been focused on a bill in the state legislature that has sat dormant since April 2022 that would allow Garden State drivers to fill up without waiting for an attendant.

On June 21, Oregon state senators voted 16-9 to end the state ban on self service gas that's existed since 1951. The bill, passed the House in March, now goes to Gov. Tina Kotek to be signed into law. It would take effect immediately if signed.

New Jersey Assemblywoman Carol Murphy, D-Camden, prime sponsor of the bi-partisan motorist choice and convenience act, says it's time to do the same here. "The rest of the nation has identified the utility in allowing customers to pump their own gas. It is now time New Jersey join them by allowing customers to choose their experience at the pump," Murphy said in a statement.

Will the legislative leadership agree? Although Assemblywoman Britnee Timberlake, D-Essex, is a co-sponsor of A-3105, it has not come up for a hearing and vote by the Commerce and Economic Development committee that she chairs. The bill was introduced on March 7, 2022. Timberlake could not be reached for comment.

The bill answers a concern about forcing people, including seniors or people with various physical issues, to pump gas by mandating that full service be available between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. at stations that have more than four pumps, for drivers who want or need it.

“This legislation gives consumers a choice. With current labor shortages, especially in our sparsely populated counties, this will cut down on lines at the gas station by opening unused pumps, giving drivers a better overall experience,” Murphy said.

Similar to Oregon, the bill’s future rests with a different Murphy, Gov. Phil Murphy, who in 2020 said he opposed lifting the ban during the coronavirus pandemic. In 2022, when gas prices spiked, he seemed willing to weigh the issue. A Murphy spokesperson said Wednesday that the governor isn’t commenting on pending or potential legislation.

The New Jersey Gasoline, C-Store, Automotive Association, representing independent gas station and convenience store owners, is in favor of the legislation. The association staged a price drop demonstration last year, where select stations shaved 15 cents off the per gallon pump price to show drivers what they could save if the self-serve ban was ditched.

“We fully support A3105 and think it’s a great compromise bill that should satisfy everyone,” said Eric Blomgren, association chief administrator and government affairs director. “It allows motorists the option to pump their own gas, while also mandating that larger stations continue to offer full-serve to those who want it.”

Similar to concerns voiced by gas station owners and operators in Oregon, pumping gas is not a job everyone wants.

“For our members, who are overwhelmingly small businesses, the big challenge for the last several years has been finding anyone willing to work pumping gas,” Blomgren said. “Under state law, you cannot sell gasoline unless an attendant pumps it for you.”

The anomaly in New Jersey is drivers of a diesel vehicle are allowed to pump their own diesel fuel, he said.

“That has actually always been the case, although in my experience most people don’t know it since they’ve never driven a diesel,” he said.

Oregon’s action will reopen the debate about New Jersey’s self-serve gas law, said Steve Carrellas, National Motorist Association state policy director.

“Allowing the self-serve option in New Jersey is long overdue and perhaps we can draw from Oregon’s approach to allowing widespread self-service to rekindle the debate here,” he said. “NJ-NMA supports the bill. We do believe there will be a discount for self-serve. The 15 cents discussed is a reasonable expectation with even more savings possible.”

He cited the results of an April 2022 Monmouth University poll that found 54% of residents surveyed were open to self-serve gas as long as stations are still required to keep an attendant on hand for full-service, while 43% opposed the idea.

If offered a choice between full-serve gas that costs 15 cents more per gallon or pumping their own for a discount, 70% polled by Monmouth University said they'd pump their own, while 26% say they would still wait for an attendant and shell out the higher price.

In true Jersey fashion, some were skeptical they'd get a discount – only 21% polled believe a self-serve option would cut the cost, while 76% believed the self-service price would be the same as the full-service gas.

“It boils down to convenience and a lower price for pumping your own gas,” Carrellas said. “The convenience is not having to wait for an attendant so you can get in and out of the station faster.”

Closed lanes at gas stations, often blocked by an orange traffic cones, are usually due to a lack of employees to pump gas, Blomgren said.

And, with labor shortages at gas stations, more stations can be open later hours. Motorists will have the freedom to choose how to fuel their vehicle, taking into account costs and wait times, he said.

Carrellas suggested doing what Oregon's proposed change would do, keep the price of full- and self-serve gas the same to avoid confusion and requiring gas pumps to have different prices.

“We just need a willingness to try something that can benefit all stakeholders, including the gasoline retailers,” he said.