

# Rare Tie Vote Blocks Clean Fuel Legislation In House

SANTA FE — A proposal to establish a clean fuel standard in New Mexico failed on a tie vote early Thursday as the House deadlocked 33-33 on the bill.

Ten Democrats — many from rural parts of the state — joined every Republican present to vote against the bill.

Two Democrats, one conservative-leaning independent and one Republican weren't present for the vote, which occurred at 3:15 a.m. after more than three hours of debate.

The session ends at noon Thursday.

The legislation, Senate Bill 14, had won approval in the Senate. It had been amended in a House committee, however, meaning it would have had to have gone back to the Senate, if passed by the House.

Republicans said the proposal would have raised gas prices and made other goods more expensive because of transportation costs.

House Minority Leader James Townsend, R-Artesia, said the proposal would have damaged the standard of living for ordinary New Mexicans, especially rural residents who face longer drives.

“Our state is already one of the poorest states in the nation,” Townsend said. “You’re proposing a bill that is going to increase fuel prices.”

State Rep. Nathan Small, a Las Cruces Democrat who presented the bill Thursday, said climate change is contributing to drought, wildfires and higher temperatures — all serious threats to New Mexico.

“We are facing catastrophic climate change that threatens so many different parts of what we do and who we are as New Mexicans,” Small said.

The proposal was aimed at enacting a clean fuel standard that would have required reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from each unit of fuel used for transportation by 20% within eight years.

The requirement would climb to 30% by 2040.

In committee, the House had added an amendment intended to allow the owners of the coal-fired San Juan plant — now set for closure in June — to keep it open longer.

The amendment came amid fears that New Mexico will face rolling blackouts this summer.

The bill has been a priority of Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Among the Democrats who voted against the bill were a number of legislators from rural parts of the state, including the northwest.

The dissenting Democratic votes came from Eliseo Alcon of Milan, Anthony Allison of Fruitland, Harry Garcia, Grants, Doreen Wonda Johnson of Church Rock, Raymundo Lara of Chamberino, Derrick Lente of Sandia Pueblo, Patricia Lundstrom of Gallup, Willie Madrid of Chaparral, Roger Montoya of Velarde and Candie Sweetser of Deming.