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# A Green Rule Boomerang

California cities are violating environmental laws to ban natural gas.

By The Editorial Board

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Liberals use California's stringent environmental regulations to block new oil and gas pipelines and electric power plants. So it's no small irony that businesses are now invoking the same rules to block local bans on new natural gas hookups.

Earlier this year the city of Berkeley prohibited natural gas connections in nearly all new buildings, while Windsor in Sonoma County banned natural gas in new low-rise residential buildings. Liberal groups are urging other cities to do the same, though switching to electric appliances would cost about \$7,200 and increase energy bills by an average \$388 per year.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

It also creates conundrums for businesses. The California Restaurant Association notes in a lawsuit against Berkeley's natural-gas ban that "losing natural gas will slow down the process of cooking, reduce a chef's control over the amount and intensity of heat, and affect the manner and flavor of food preparation."

The restaurant group claims that the Berkeley City Council

circumvented a state law requiring cities to obtain approval from the California Energy Commission for energy-efficiency standards more stringent than the state's. The law requires cities to submit their findings on the "cost effectiveness" of their proposed standards, but that's hard to show given how much more expensive electric appliances are.

Separately, Sonoma County developers are challenging Windsor's ban under the California Environmental Quality Act, which requires an environmental impact report including notice and comment for almost any local government action. Windsor simply declared its natural-gas ban exempt from the law because it is "more protective of the environment than State Standards"—end of discussion.

But as one developer argues, Windsor failed to consider "whether the existing electrical grid is sufficient to satisfy the demand of all new construction under a 100% electricity standard," which the state has mandated for 2045. And if new homes can't use natural-gas for their backyard barbecues, fireplaces or generators, might they use more carbon-intensive fuels like gasoline, wood or charcoal? And might those fuel sources increase the risk of forest fires?

Progressive cities can't flout state environmental regulations merely because they are advancing an anti-carbon agenda.

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