

Something New Could Be in the Offing at Gas Pumps in New Jersey -- Self-Service

[Tom Johnson](#) | May 19, 2015

Bill would let Garden State drivers pump their own, but would keep full-service islands for disabled customers, others



Tired of waiting for an attendant to pump gas when you pull up at a service station? If a bill introduced last week becomes law, motorists could choose to fill their own tanks, ending New Jersey's long ban on self-service gas stations.

The bipartisan legislation (S-2944) would allow for voluntary self-service, but stations would still be required to have at least one full-service island for the next three years for those who don't want to pump their own gas and are willing to pay a higher price for the fuel.

The issue of self-service -- New Jersey is one of only two states with a ban on the practice -- has surfaced in many legislative sessions over the past six decades, but there is a new wrinkle this time around. The trade group representing gasoline retailers has dropped its long-standing opposition to self-service.

Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, C-Store, Automotive Association, said the organization's shift on self-service is simply recognition of the big changes in the retail gasoline market the past 30 years.

In the past, the independent gas retailers competed against stations owned by the big oil companies, which largely have left the retail market.

"We were never able to compete against them," said Risalvato, citing the oil companies' much bigger resources. "They would have buried us."

The sponsors of the bill said it would allow stations to discount the prices of self-service gas, but they also would have to provide full-service at same price for those with disabilities. They also argued improvements in technology has made filling up your own tank far safer than the past.

"There's no reason that those who want to pump their own gas shouldn't be allowed to do so," said Sen. Gerald Cardinale (R-Bergen), a cosponsor of the bill. "Allowing the option of self-service will reduce costs for stations and motorists alike."

The bill would remove the \$500 penalty for pumping your own gas in New Jersey, according to Sen. Paul Sarlo (D-Bergen), the other sponsor, "We shouldn't penalize drivers for pumping their own gas, which is allowed in nearly every other state," he said.

Besides New Jersey, Oregon is the only state with a ban on self-service, but, it too is considering legislation that would lift the prohibition.

Despite the backing of the trade association, the bill still faces opposition in some quarters, including the potential loss of jobs when stations convert some lanes to self-service.

Risalvato disputed that argument saying retailers will still have to keep many of the attendants on to man the full-service lanes.

Some lawmakers also are opposed to lifting the prohibition on self-service.

"There continue to be ample reasons to keep this ban in place," said Sen Jeff Van Drew (D-Cape May). "Requiring full service is one of things we do right and that we offer our residents beyond what other states do."