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OAKLAND, Calif. - In the face of fierce opposition from Big Oil companies and Republican legislators, the California state Assembly will decide on an array of pace-setting legislative bills to combat climate change within the next three weeks, thrusting the Golden State into the forefront of this consequential global struggle.

The state Senate already approved the package of

climate bills in June that California Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat, has agreed to sign into law once passed by the Assembly. Both state legislative houses are controlled by Democrats.

"This package of bills represents the most far-reaching effort to fight climate change in the history of our nation," Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin de Leon declared in a statement. "These bills put California on path to sustainable economic growth, while also protecting the health of our communities."

Earlier this week the state legislative battle heated up when Presente.org in partnership with California Environmental Justice Alliance, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Communities for a Better Environment, and the Greenlining Institute blasted the oil industry.

In an online message, the groups accuse the oil industry of "buying influence with legislators, spending millions on dishonest advertisements, and intimidating critics" while "peddling the false claim that a clean economy will hurt low-income communities."

On Tuesday, Presente.org and its partners released results of a survey conducted by Latino Decisions **showing that the state's Latino voters overwhelmingly support** stronger state measures to fight pollution particularly in communities of color, decrease dependency on petroleum and expand the green economy.

The poll further revealed that 82 percent of Latino respondents would be more favorable toward a legislator who supported a bill to add new penalties and fines to companies that pollute.

The poll is sending a strong message to wavering legislators from California Latinos, who now make up the single largest ethnic group, larger than whites, at 38 percent of the overall population, as well as a large slice of the eligible voters in the state.

As the loosely knit coalition - including environmental groups, consumer advocates, labor representatives and renewable energy entrepreneurs - ratchet up their activities in favor of the climate bills, the environmental organization 350.org is **appealing directly to the public to join the fray.**

Oil companies are particularly riled by that portion of Senate Bill (SB) 350 that proposes a 50 percent reduction in petroleum use in cars and trucks by 2030.

In addition, SB 350 sets a 15-year target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions by requiring:

That 50 percent of energy supply come from solar, wind and other renewable sources.

Doubling the energy efficiency of existing buildings.

The Senate approved SB 350 on a 24-14 vote, with all Republicans voting no.

Out of the 12 bills making up the legislative package, two more bills are key:

SB 32 commits California to slash greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

SB 185 requires California's sizeable public employees' and teachers' pension funds to divest from coal.

Other pieces of legislation the Senate approved would direct cap and trade funds towards public transportation infrastructure and establish a committee to advise the Legislature on climate policies that would create jobs.

The California legislative package if approved by the state Assembly in its present form will represent a formidable boost to **climate initiatives of President Barack Obama** and **mandates of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**, and a major slap at Republicans in Congress out to undermine the president's agenda.

Significantly in September, as the fight on the California climate bills heads for a final showdown in the Assembly, widely popular Pope Francis is scheduled to visit the U.S. and **expected to appeal for urgent and far-reaching action on climate change** and the eradication of poverty in the world before the United Nations and most likely also the U.S. Congress.

*Photo: Sacramento, Calif., Aug. 25, 2015. **California Environmental Justice Alliance/Facebook***

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