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North Carolina Sen. Wiley Nickel (D) wants to fine drivers who block electric vehicle charging stations.

Maxine Joselow, E&E News reporter • Published: Monday, May 6, 2019

A Democrat in North Carolina has introduced a bill to punish drivers for blocking electric vehicle charging stations.

S.B. 511, from state Sen. Wiley Nickel, would outlaw the behavior and impose a fine of \$100. The measure is aimed at combating a new trend called "ICEing," in which pickup truck drivers purposefully park in front of EV charging stations, blocking access to them (*Climatewire*, Jan. 2).

The trend, whose name is derived from "internal combustion engine," is used as a way of protesting EVs and their association with environmentalists. It joins the practice of "rolling coal," in which people modify diesel engines to spew black clouds of soot as a way of protesting environmental regulations.

To be sure, ICEing can also be unintentional if drivers don't realize they're parked in an EV charging spot.

ICEing grabbed headlines in North Carolina around Christmas following a viral post on the social networking website Reddit.

Reddit user Leicina shared a photo on Dec. 23, 2018, of three large pickups blocking access to Tesla chargers at a Sheetz gas station in Hickory, N.C. The drivers apparently chanted "fuck Tesla."

"I've never had a supercharging experience like this one," **wrote** Leicina, who owns a Tesla Model 3. "These trucks blocked all the chargers, chanted 'F' Tesla, and were kicked out by a Sheetz employee."

She added, "Who do you report activity like this to? It was really uncomfortable."

Nickel, who served as a staffer for former Vice President Al Gore before joining the North Carolina General Assembly this year, told E&E News the Reddit post spurred him to action.

"The Hickory incident was really the reason I filed the bill," Nickel said in an interview. "I even followed up and talked to the police about it. They said there was nothing they can do because it's not against the law in North Carolina to park in a local EV charging spot."

He added, "I was a Gore staffer, and I did everything I could to fight the climate crisis. But Democrats only have 21 out of 50 seats in the state Senate. So this was my attempt at finding some common ground. This would help electric vehicles, but it's also something Republicans could support."

The measure has picked up two Republican co-sponsors in the state Senate, including the chair of the powerful rules committee. The House transportation committee passed the bill last week with no dissenting votes, and the Senate transportation committee is expected to take up the legislation this week.

Nickel, who was the sixth person in North Carolina to purchase a Tesla Model S, expressed optimism about the chances of moving the bill through the GOP-controlled General Assembly and getting the signature of Gov. Roy Cooper (D).

"I'm hopeful that it will be passed. So far, no opposition," he said. "I think Gov. Cooper will very likely sign the bill. I couldn't imagine why he wouldn't. He has an executive order dealing with climate change and is a supporter of electric vehicles."

Executive Order 80 calls for boosting the number of registered zero-emission vehicles in the state to at least 80,000 by 2025. Cooper issued the order in October 2018.

Environmentalists, who have watched the rise of ICEing with frustration, praised the Nickel measure.

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Still, the Nickel measure strikes a sharp contrast with Republican-backed legislation seeking to raise the registration fee for EVs in the state.

S.B. 446, from state Sen. Jim Davis (R), would increase the registration fee to \$230. That would be the steepest such fee in the country, surpassing Georgia and West Virginia (\$200), according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Davis has argued that EV drivers don't pay their fair share for road maintenance, since they don't pay the state gasoline tax. Democrats have countered that the bill would discourage people from buying EVs and could undermine the tourism industry. The measure appears unlikely to pass this legislative session.

North Carolina is on par with the rest of the country in terms of EV sales. Approximately 4,700 EVs were sold in the state last year, accounting for roughly 1% of the market, according to the latest figures from the tracking website EVAdoption.

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