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## **NJ's No-Customer-Pumps-Gas Regulation and Other States' — Cameron on Transportation**

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Did you ever wonder why you can't pump your own gasoline in New Jersey?

Self-serve has been the rule nationwide since the first pump-your-own gas station opened in 1947 in California. All gas stations had previously been full-service.

In addition to filling your tank, “pump jockeys” checked your oil, water levels in your radiator and washed your windows — and maybe even gave you a set of free steak knives for your 35-cent-a-gallon purchase. Remember those good ol' days?

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When the self-serve idea came to New Jersey, a Hackensack gas station owner named Irving Reingold began offering a discount to those who pumped it themselves. Instead of charging the average rate of 21.9 cents per gallon, Reingold offered self-serve for 18.9 cents.

His operation became wildly popular, prompting competitors to retaliate by shooting up his station and forcing Reingold to install bullet-proof glass. Competitors then persuaded the state Legislature to ban self-serve and Reingold eventually went out of business.

New Jersey lawmakers passed the Retail Gasoline Dispensing Safety Act in 1949.

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“Because of the fire hazards directly associated with dispensing fuel, it is in the public interest that gasoline station operators have the control needed over that activity to ensure compliance with appropriate safety procedures, including turning off vehicle engines and refraining from smoking while fuel is dispensed,” the act reads.

The law remains in effect in New Jersey. Oregon, which passed its law in 1951, is the only other state that prohibits self-service. However, Oregon recently relaxed its law to allow self-serve during the overnight hours in rural counties due to pressure from consumers.

There is a \$500 fine in each of the states for violating the law, though it’s seldom enforced. A 2015 study showed there were no summonses issued the previous two years in New Jersey.

There is a similar self-service ban in Huntington, N.Y., despite appeals from gas station owners in the Long Island town to stay competitive.

New Jersey residents have been trying for years to have the Garden State ban lifted.

In 2015, state Assemblyman Dean O’Scanlon introduced a bill to allow self-service, saying he was “offended by people that argue that New Jerseyians are mentally incapable of pumping their own gas without setting themselves on fire.”

Critics say New Jersey uses the ban to protect thousands of pump-jockey jobs and higher profit margins for

station owners.

Connecticut lawmakers seem to trust Nutmeggers to pump their own fuel. The new technology at pumps helps prevent accidents and cases of motorist self-immolation are exceedingly rare.

However, one quirk in Connecticut gas-dispensing laws still being debated is the controversial “zone pricing,” which allows location to dictate the cost of fuel instead of good ol’ American competition. But that’s a story for another time.

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