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ENVIRONMENT

What to watch in the Legislature as lawmakers weigh changes to natural gas regulation, mining oversight and water law

By Daniel Rothberg

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2) Changing mining oversight: A few weeks before the Legislature convened on Feb. 1, the seven commissioners who oversee the Nevada Division of Minerals held a public meeting to discuss legislation that the mining industry was closely monitoring: [three resolutions](#) to raise taxes. The commission [wrote a letter](#) saying the mining tax resolutions were not in the state's interest, and the commissioners recommended the formation of a task force to study the issue.

The division, a non-cabinet agency, has a dual mandate. It is charged with regulating oil, gas, geothermal and lithium brine exploration. At the same time, it educates the public about mining, provides information about the industry, and advocates on policy. The division's oversight board, comprising commissioners with backgrounds in extractive industries, advise the governor and the state on policy related to the industry. **AB240** [aims to separate those two functions](#).

The proposed legislation, which had its first hearing this week, would dissolve the Division of Minerals and fold its regulatory function into the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, which oversees hardrock mine permitting. The Governor's Office of Economic Development, which serves as a clearinghouse for industry, would assume the division's other roles.

Assemblyman Howard Watts (D-Las Vegas) introduced the bill. At a hearing on Monday, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Nevada Conservation League supported the measure, arguing that it would reduce the influence of the industry in crafting regulations and state policy.

But environmental groups were split. Great Basin Resource Watch, a mining watchdog group, and the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada argued against the bill because it would dissolve an [oversight board](#) that last met in 2015 and currently has no members. A Sisolak spokesperson said the governor has received applications and plans to make appointments.

The division, the Nevada Mining Association, the [Nevada Mineral Exploration Coalition](#) and the [Women's Mining Coalition](#) argued against the bill, questioning why a change was necessary.