Oil and Gas News Briefs
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Russia's 50-billion-barrel Vostok Oil project loads first cargo

(Bloomberg; Sept. 5) - The giant Vostok Oil project in Russia's distant Taimyr region has loaded its first crude for shipment via the Northern Sea Route, expanding the nation's presence in the Arctic and paving the way for future growth of its oil production. The first cargo from Vostok Oil was loaded on the high-ice-class tanker Valentin Pikul at the newly built terminal of Sever Bay, "the northernmost port in the world," Igor Sechin, CEO of oil producer Rosneft, said Sept. 5 at the opening ceremony at the port.

Another Arctic-class tanker, the Akademik Gubkin, is anchored near Sever Bay, awaiting its turn to moor, Sechin told President Vladimir Putin, who watched the televised ceremony from his office. Vostok Oil "is a new oil province of a global scale with a resource base of more than 7 billion tons (about 50 billion barrels) of high-quality oil with low sulfur content," Sechin said. The crude will be shipped to buyers in the Asia-Pacific and "in the western direction," said Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak.

Vostok, which faced delays and the exit of foreign investors following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, is expected to drive the nation's oil production for decades. It is also set to significantly increase shipments across the Northern Sea Route, an Arctic waterway that Russia has been promoting as the shortest route between Europe and Asia. Use of the route has been hampered by Western sanctions against Russia, the harsh climate and a lack of high-ice-class vessels. Vostok is set to supply 1 million barrels a day by 2030, roughly 10% of Russia's total current production, according to Bloomberg calculations.

China's oil consumption declines as country shifts to EVs

(Bloomberg; Sept. 2) - The millions of Chinese drivers who turned to charging stations over gas pumps as the Iran war drove up fuel prices have helped shift the country's climate trajectory. China's oil consumption fell 9% year-on-year in the second quarter of 2026, driven by a 16% slump in the transport sector, according to a report from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. Crude processing dropped 11%. Electric vehicles were a major beneficiary as gasoline and diesel became more expensive.

Although coal use at power stations continued to rise, the decline in oil demand helped trim total emissions by 1% — the first time that oil rather than coal has been responsible for a drop in China's emissions, CREA said. "The rise in oil prices has caused a stronger shift in China's transportation sector than anyone anticipated, with EV

deployment and use accelerating from an already high base," said Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at CREA. "This trend is unlikely to be reversed."

The government's drive to electrify the economy is upending calculations on energy demand. The chairman of state-owned Sinopec, China's top refiner, said last week it's very likely the country's oil consumption peaked last year, five years ahead of target. The shift is significant. If the marginal drop in emissions last year can be sustained, it would put Beijing well ahead of its commitment to peak carbon before 2030. Electric heavy-duty trucks in particular are having a breakout year as elevated diesel prices drive a sales boom. The total number of EVs grew by a third in the second quarter.

Uganda names its crude 'Pearl Sweet;' startup expected end of year

(Reuters; Sept. 2) - Uganda on Sept. 2 named its blended crude oil grade "Pearl Sweet," a key step ahead of the East African country's planned start of commercial oil production by the end of this year. Uganda discovered commercial crude reserves two decades ago in fields along the Albertine basin on its border with Democratic Republic of Congo. Commercial output has been repeatedly delayed by a lack of infrastructure and disputes between the government and international oil companies over plans.

President Yoweri Museveni unveiled the name at a ceremony in Kikuube district. He said "Sweet" refers to the crude's low-sulfur content, while "Pearl" is drawn from Uganda's description as the "Pearl of Africa," a phrase popularized by former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. After the naming, companies developing the fields will begin "outreach to different refineries, market intelligence activities and commercial negotiations with interested parties," state-owned oil firm UNOC said in a statement.

Uganda's recoverable reserves are estimated at 1.65 billion barrels, with peak output expected to reach 230,000 barrels per day. France's TotalEnergies is the majority owner of the fields with a 56.67% stake. China's CNOOC holds 28.33%. UNOC owns the rest. Pearl Sweet will be exported through the $5 billion East African Crude Oil Pipeline, an 897-mile link from Uganda's oil fields to the Tanzanian port of Tanga on the Indian Ocean. The pipeline is billed as the world's longest electrically heated oil pipeline.

Many U.S. oil industry execs skeptical of Trump move on Venezuela

(The Wall Street Journal; Sept. 3) - Big Oil has suddenly found itself staring down a new rival in Venezuela: Bigger Oil. The Trump administration is painting its foray into the country's oil patch as about more than drilling. Investing in a little-known private operator will give the U.S. the chance, officials argue, to police the corruption that has long troubled the industry there. U.S. oil executives say that plan sounds like trouble.

Industry leaders and lobbyists from Texas to Washington say they were blindsided by President Trump's brazen push into Venezuela, which is home to some of the world's largest proven oil reserves. Many say they are skeptical the deal can survive future governments in either country because it is unpopular among Democrats in the U.S. and Venezuela's democratic opposition alike. One Texas executive said it appeared the Trump administration, in a last-ditch effort to cut gasoline prices before November's midterm elections, is turning to socialist-like methods of taking over oil production.

"No one wants to go down there and take over a mess and then get blamed for the mess," said Shad Frazier, a consultant and former oil executive at Apache in Houston. "The worry is, when you have a change in U.S. administration in two years, what happens then? No one likes to invest into chaos." The U.S. oil industry has long opposed government intervention in the fossil fuel business — and some executives are worried Trump's first venture into state capitalism in the industry could create a giant with the ability to push them around.

It will take time and money to produce Venezuela's undeveloped oil

(The New York Times; Sept. 4) - The Trump administration's new partner in Venezuela stands to vastly expand its reach in the country's most important oil basins as part of an unorthodox deal announced last week. Yet meaningfully increasing production from the areas will be expensive and time consuming for North American Blue Energy Partners, Venezuela's second-largest private oil producer and the U.S. government's new partner.

Roughly half of the 17 production areas covered under the deal are in Lake Maracaibo, according to a project list obtained and independently corroborated by The New York Times. The lake is a longstanding oil-producing area in the northwestern corner of the country that has fallen into disrepair. The other half are sprinkled throughout an oil-rich cradle called the Orinoco Belt, much of it a savanna that stretches across central and northeastern Venezuela. Most of the country's reserves are buried there, but that oil is the consistency of asphalt. Transforming it into a liquid that can be piped is expensive.

Many of the areas in the Orinoco made available to North American Blue Energy under the deal are largely undeveloped, so in addition to drilling new wells, the company most likely would have to invest in infrastructure like pipelines and processing facilities. "This is a huge amount of money that's needed, and then you need the people, too — it's not just the steel and the pipe and the engineering," said Bob Fryklund, a vice president at S&P Global Energy. Another challenge will be a dilapidated electric grid. Years of corruption and mismanagement mean that power outages are common.

U.S. actions in Venezuela part of effort to push out China

(Bloomberg; Sept. 4) - Venezuela is becoming a major testing ground for President Donald Trump's hemispheric ambitions and emerging as another potential source of rivalry with China. After announcing plans to seize control of more than 65 billion barrels of Venezuela's crude reserves, the Trump administration made clear that was only the start. Ahead is a campaign to squeeze out China and powers like Russia, in a push to ensure "American dominance in our hemisphere is never again questioned."

Next on Washington's agenda is an attempt to restructure Venezuela's debt, which includes billions of dollars owed to China. The U.S. has cast its campaign as the latest chapter of the "Donroe Doctrine," codified in the White House's National Security Strategy and which asserts a unilateral U.S. right to deny rival powers the ability to own or control "strategically vital assets." Under that banner, taking Venezuelan oil fields from Chinese companies is a geopolitical opportunity to align them with U.S. interests.

China's reaction so far has been relatively muted. For Beijing, Venezuela has become a less important source of energy in recent years. Crude from the country accounted for only 4% of the country's total oil imports in 2025. No Venezuelan cargoes have been recorded arriving in China since the U.S. assumed control of the assets following the capture earlier this year of then-President Nicolás Maduro. The bigger blow might be to the billions of dollars in debt owed to Chinese banks, which is tied to undelivered oil.

Eni's oil deal with Venezuela improves odds of collecting on old debt

(Reuters; Sept. 4) - Italian oil company Eni has improved its chances of recovering more than $2.3 billion owed by Venezuela with the signing this week of a new oil project deal in the country, analysts said on Sept. 4. After nearly three decades in Venezuela, Eni accumulated the large receivables from state-owned oil group PDVSA. As Washington and Caracas moved this year to reopen Venezuela's oil sector to international investment, Eni faced a choice: Deepen its commitment to the country or risk worsening its chances of recovering its claims as the U.S. pushes to restructure old debt.

Eni's decision to remain in the country despite political upheaval, economic collapse and U.S. sanctions is beginning to yield results. Eni on Sept. 2 signed an agreement with PDVSA to develop the giant Junin 5 heavy-oil project in the country's Orinoco Belt, securing a key role in U.S.-backed efforts to revive the country's oil industry. Eni and PDVSA plan to invest about $1.5 billion a year in the project, which currently produces about 12,000 barrels per day. Output is expected to reach 400,000 a day by 2030.

The project converts Eni's existing stake in Junin 5 to a 25-year production-sharing agreement, with Eni as the field operator. "We see the deal as an opportunity to unlock future production and recover existing receivables," an analysis by Barclays said. On top of Venezuela's debt to Eni of $2.3 billion, the country owes $400 million to a 20-

year-old gas joint venture at the Perla field that is equally owned by Eni and Spain's Repsol. Eni continued operating the offshore project even after U.S. sanctions halted Venezuela's payments. The output has gone almost exclusively for domestic use.

OPEC+ makes no changes to production quotas for October

(Wall Street Journal; Sept. 6) - Key members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies agreed to hold oil production quotas steady in October after six straight monthly increases, as the focus shifts to setting quotas for next year. The Sept. 6 decision comes as the war between the U.S. and Iran continues to severely disrupt global oil flows, forcing some members to fall short of their quotas and limiting the ability of OPEC+ to bring additional barrels to consumers and influence markets.

Seven members of OPEC+ last month agreed to raise output by about 188,000 barrels a day for September, completing the phased unwinding of 1.65 million barrels a day of voluntary supply cuts originally agreed in 2023. The participating countries include Saudi Arabia — the group's de facto leader — along with Russia, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Kazakhstan and Oman. Separate cuts of around 2 million barrels a day introduced by the broader OPEC+ group in 2022 remain in place through the end of the year.

The cartel is also reviewing the production capacity of OPEC+ members after saying last year it would create a system to set output baselines for 2027 that would dictate future quotas. The Middle East conflict, however, could test the group's cohesion if producers seek to increase output beyond their targets once regional oil flows normalize, according to analysts. The seven OPEC+ producers are scheduled to meet again on Oct. 4 to decide production levels for November.

U.S. diesel prices climb to new record high

(Wall Street Journal; Sept. 4) - President Donald Trump came into office pledging to lower energy prices for Americans. Instead, he is presiding over a historic run-up in fuel prices. Diesel prices hit an average $5.85 a gallon on Sept. 4, according to OPIS, a Dow Jones company. It is a new record that surpasses the previous one from 2022, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent energy markets into a tailspin.

Americans ready to hit the road for Labor Day weekend will do so fueled by the most expensive gasoline ever at this time of the year: about $4.15 a gallon — nearly 95 cents more than last year. The jump in diesel is especially worrisome because the fuel is the lifeblood of the U.S. economy and the increase is set to filter into already high inflation. Trucks and trains rely on it to move goods across the country; farmers depend on it to plant crops. When prices jump, businesses pass on the cost to consumers.

“I don’t think there’s any way to avoid widespread price pressure from continuing,” said William O’Neil, an analyst at S&P Global. The monthslong closure of the Strait of Hormuz has constricted crude flows to Asia, where giant refineries ordinarily transform it into fuel. Iranian strikes have damaged large plants in the Middle East, and Ukrainian drone attacks have shut down a number of refineries in Russia. The U.S. is exporting huge amounts of diesel worldwide, which is pushing prices higher domestically.

The snarl-up is happening at perhaps the worst possible time. Farmers are gearing up for the harvest season, and large parts of the Northeast are less than a month away from burning heating oil to stay warm. Meanwhile, some refineries are shutting down production as they undergo seasonal maintenance, further reducing available supplies.

Goldman Sachs says oil could go to $120 if attacks increase

(Bloomberg; Sept. 7) - Oil may rally to as much as $120 a barrel if attacks on shipping in the Middle East increase, according to Goldman Sachs, which recommended bets on natural gas and diesel as a way to capture gains. “Events over the last few days do suggest that the risk of shipping disruptions broadening and intensifying is an important one,” Daan Struyven, co-head of global commodities research, said on Bloomberg TV.

Crude has rallied to the highest since July, as the U.S. and Iran remain in a stalemate over the Strait of Hormuz. In recent days, Washington attacked Iranian tankers, while Tehran declared a new restricted zone outside the waterway. U.S. naval forces continue to blockade Iranian ports, while escorting other producers’ vessels out. In addition to Goldman’s upside scenario of $120 a barrel, the bank also has a lower target of $80 should exports from the region normalize, Struyven said. Brent last traded near $97.

The standoff after more than six months of war has boosted a wide array of energy prices, with gains in natural gas and petroleum products outpacing crude oil. Industrial fuel diesel has more than doubled this year. China is expected to continue acting as a “stabilizing force” in the crude market, reining in imports in response to elevated prices, according to Struyven.

South Korea reportedly agrees to invest in Texas gas power plant

(Reuters; Sept. 7) - South Korea and the United States have agreed on the size of Seoul's planned investment in a gas project in Texas at around $22.3 billion, Korean media outlet Edaily reported on Sept. 7, citing unidentified officials and politicians. The project, which would be Seoul's first U.S. investment under last year's trade agreement, aims to build a 6.3-gigawatt gas-fueled power plant in Encinal, Texas, to meet rising power demand for AI data centers, according to the media reports.

The investment would be part of the trade deal signed by the two allies last year, under which Seoul pledged $350 billion worth of U.S. investments in exchange for favorable U.S. tariffs on imports of South Korean goods. The reports did not say whether Seoul would shoulder the entire cost of the Texas project. Seoul is also considering other potential projects in the United States, including building a large-scale nuclear power plant or a liquefied natural gas project in Alaska, the reports said.

South Korea's Industry Ministry said reports on the Texas gas project were inaccurate and that consultations between Seoul and Washington were continuing, making it difficult to confirm specific details. The South Korea government would make an announcement after completing negotiations with the U.S. and taking into account procedures such as parliamentary approval, the ministry added.

Asia looking to build up its oil storage capacity

(Al Jazeera; Sept. 3) - Asia suffered some of the worst economic fallout when the United States and Israel went to war with Iran six months ago. The region is heavily reliant on oil and gas that normally flows through the Strait of Hormuz, where shipping has been reduced to a trickle by Iranian attacks and a U.S. naval blockade. Asian countries quickly imposed fuel conservation measures as oil and gas prices surged, ranging from price caps to alternate driving days and work-from-home mandates for civil servants.

In the months since, Asia has begun seeking a more permanent solution to the biggest energy disruption in history — keeping the oil and gas it needs much closer to home. “The crisis is producing two very different kinds of investment: infrastructure that bypasses geopolitical risk, and infrastructure that eliminates exposure to imported fuel altogether,” said Parul Bakshi, of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. Asia’s biggest economies are exploring expanded storage capacity in Asia directly with Gulf suppliers.

One of the most ambitious proposals to emerge from the crisis has come from Japan. Though highly dependent on Middle Eastern energy, Japan has weathered the crisis better than many other economies because it holds one of the world’s largest strategic oil reserves. Tokyo wants its neighbors in Southeast Asia to follow its lead. In April, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi announced the $10 billion POWERR Asia initiative, aimed at helping Southeast Asian economies procure oil and petroleum products and, in the long-term, build up strategic stockpiles.

Europe’s gas storage inventories lowest in at least 15 years

(Wall Street Journal; Sept. 2) - Europe has put off buying natural gas for the winter in a potentially risky bet that the Iran war will be over soon and prices will drop. The European Union’s gas storage facilities are only 65% full, their lowest level toward the

end of summer in at least 15 years. Companies have been reluctant to buy gas for storage because they anticipated that Qatar, the world's second-largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, would be able to resume normal shipments through the Strait of Hormuz this year once the conflict dies down.

Now, prospects for an end to the war before winter are fading, driving up LNG prices to a 3½-year high this week. European buyers are being forced to accept more expensive gas as the Continent's winter season approaches, when gas demand peaks. They are bidding against each other and Asian buyers who are now aggressively locking up supplies. "Europe is heading into winter with its gas tank at a record low, and the market is priced as if that's fine," said Simone Turri, head of the Western Europe gas desk at MET Group, an energy trading firm based in Switzerland. "Something has to give."

The low storage levels reflect a sharp deviation from Europe's energy security strategy, drafted four years ago when Russia's invasion of Ukraine cut Europe's fuel supplies and sparked an energy crisis. The EU passed rules requiring countries to fill their storage to at least 90% full by Nov. 1, protecting the Continent from attempts by the Kremlin or other adversaries to use gas as a weapon. But this spring, the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said member states should aim to fill storage up to 80% rather than 90%, giving them the flexibility to put off some gas purchases with prices surging.

Several empty Qatari LNG tankers head back toward Persian Gulf

(Bloomberg; Sept. 7) - Several Qatari liquefied natural gas tankers are heading back toward the Persian Gulf, a sign the supplier may be positioning vessels for a resumption of exports through the Strait of Hormuz. Six empty gas carriers linked to Qatar are in the Gulf of Oman or on their way there, according to ship-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg. Another empty ship recently crossed the Hormuz and is currently in the Persian Gulf heading toward Qatar, Kpler data shows.

Qatar, which used to account for a fifth of the world's LNG, has all-but halted shipments since one of its tankers was attacked in late July. The ship movements suggest Qatar might be taking a more aggressive approach, even as fighting between the U.S. and Iran has flared up again. The producer has continued loading LNG onto available empty tankers inside the gulf and also kept exporting fuel to Kuwait, helping it manage storage and keep parts of its massive export complex running at minimum levels.

Maintaining some output allows QatarEnergy to keep equipment operational and gives it the flexibility ramp up more quickly if tensions in the waterway ease. But months of disrupted exports have steadily depleted the pool of available empty vessels. There are now 15 LNG carriers idled behind Hormuz carrying Qatari gas, while two vessels are currently loading at Qatar's Ras Laffan export terminal, according to ship-tracking data.

Taiwanese government proposes billions in energy subsidies

(Bloomberg; Sept. 3) - Taiwan has proposed more than $13 billion in funding, mainly for its state-run energy companies, to secure liquefied natural gas and shield electricity users when a price freeze expires at the end of the month. The cabinet on Sept. 3 finalized a supplementary budget that includes a NT$234 billion ($7.4 billion) capital injection and a further NT$100 billion-plus in subsidies for CPC Corp., the company responsible for importing LNG for power generation.

The proposal — which is conditional on approval by the opposition-controlled legislature — also includes NT$71 billion in subsidies for Taiwan Power Co., funds that will help the loss-making utility offset rising fuel costs arising from the war in the Middle East. The move highlights how governments around the world are seeking to contain the impact of high energy costs caused by more than six months of conflict. Asian spot LNG prices have more than doubled since the war began.

The supply disruption has prompted some nations to lean more into coal or to accelerate the adoption of solar and other sources of renewable energy. Taiwan imported about 34% of its LNG from Qatar last year. With the Persian Gulf nation now largely unable to send cargoes through Hormuz, the replacement of this long-term supply with spot-market shipments is costing Taipei nearly $900 million a month at current prices, according to Bloomberg calculations.

Australia’s first shale gas play could boost supply for LNG exports

(Reuters commentary; Sept. 3) - A remote shale natural gas field in northern Australia may seem like an unusual beneficiary of the Iran conflict. But energy security is once again paramount as Asia grapples with the fallout from the war, and a new scramble for long-life resources is taking shape. The Beetaloo Basin lies about 373 miles from the Northern Territory capital of Darwin, a remote city closer to the Indonesian capital Jakarta than it is to Australia's major city of Sydney, some 2,400 miles away.

Beetaloo marked a milestone in its protracted development this week with the first gas flowing from an appraisal well to a new pipeline connected to an existing line going to Darwin. The initial flow, a tiny 37 million cubic feet per day, will be fed into the Northern Territory's grid. But while the startup flows are modest, the potential is vast with the companies operating in the Beetaloo reporting that recoverable gas reserves are at least 200 trillion cubic feet, comparable to the Marcellus shale in the U.S.

Just as shale revolutionized the U.S. gas market and provided the feedstock to make it the world's biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas, there are hopes the Beetaloo can do the same for Australia, the world's third-largest exporter of LNG. Beetaloo would be the first major shale play; the main challenge is building the infrastructure to transport the gas from the field to either Darwin or Queensland. Santos has approval to build a

second LNG train at its Darwin plant and could use Beetaloo gas as feedstock, or if a pipeline is built to Queensland it could be used to backfill the Gladstone LNG plant.

The key to the rapid development of the Beetaloo is getting the various federal, state and territory governments to work with the gas and pipeline companies to work out the cheapest and fastest way to build common-user infrastructure.

Australian shale gas developers don't want to duplicate mistakes

(Reuters; Sept. 4) - Developers of shale gas in Australia's Northern Territory say they plan to replicate the liquefied natural gas export boom of the State of Queensland, but without the duplication of infrastructure and overspending that occurred in the neighboring state in the 2010s. The Northern Territory's Beetaloo sub-basin was surveyed more than 30 years ago but the first commercial volumes of shale gas were shipped only this week from Tamboran Resources' Shenandoah gas project.

Beetaloo shale aspirations have met with initial skepticism by many industry watchers. The basin's current output is a modest 37 million cubic feet per day, but producers ultimately envisage developments on par with the LNG export industry, one of the top three in the world. "The learned experience of the coal-seam rollout is that it's not in anyone's interest to go their own way," Beetaloo Energy CEO Alex Underwood said at the South East Asia Australia Offshore & Onshore Conference.

Developers hope that their gas will find multiple buyers such as LNG plants in Darwin owned by Santos and Inpex, possibly also LNG export plants on the East Coast and potentially sending power to data centers. They want to avoid the lack of collaboration that resulted in too much duplication in the Queensland LNG industry. Underwood said there was "massive overexpenditure" at Gladstone, where there are three LNG plants. "Ideally Gladstone would have one larger LNG plant with one big pipe coming into it, but there's multiple pipes, multiple LNG plants, which is not particularly capital efficient."

No details on Japan's next round of investments in U.S.

(Bloomberg; Sept. 5) - Japanese Trade Minister Ryosei Akazawa said progress was being made on a $550 billion investment initiative set up as part of a trade deal with the U.S. last year. "We'll continue working closely with the U.S.," Akazawa said. He spoke to reporters in Washington on Sept. 4 after meeting with U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

Akazawa declined to comment in detail on a third tranche of projects under the pact. So far, two rounds of projects have been announced including resource-related deals and power plants. He said that discussions on artificial intelligence and chips will carry "very

significant weight.” The $550 billion vehicle was set up to spur a wave of Japanese investment in key U.S. industries and was a central pillar of the tariff deal last year, under which President Donald Trump agreed to set levies at 15% on Japanese products and lower the duty for automobiles, a critical driver for Japan’s economy.

The first batch of projects aims to invest $36 billion in U.S. oil, gas and mineral projects, including a natural gas facility in Ohio. The second group eyes $73 billion investments for a nuclear power project across Tennessee and Alabama and natural gas power plants in Pennsylvania and Texas.

Trump administration will review California coastal management

(Associated Press; Sept. 4) - The Trump administration is ratcheting up its fight to get more crude flowing in California and reverse the state's efforts to move away from fossil fuels. Its latest salvo is a federal review of California's coastal management program, which is run largely by a state commission that has had a powerful role for decades in shaping development along the coast.

Environmental advocates fear federal officials could use the review to strip the California Coastal Commission of its ability to have a say in projects involving federal agencies that affect the state's coastal bluffs, pristine beaches and world-class surfing spots. The administration, citing a need for energy security and jobs, has already announced plans for new offshore oil leases in California as well as Florida, where the U.S. government has not allowed drilling since 1995 because of concerns about spills.

Trump officials also helped a Texas firm jump-start an old pipeline that had been idled since its 2015 rupture caused one of California’s worst oil spills, blackening beaches for 150 miles. Federal officials recently took a step toward authorizing fracking from an old oil platform 9 miles off Ventura County — a move opposed by the coastal commission. “It's just part of that overall belief that they have, that they're going to get rid of renewables and go back to good old-fashioned fossil fuels, and what better place to start than California?” said Deborah Sivas, a professor of environmental law at Stanford.