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California Gov. Newsom is right. Truck drivers and autonomous trucks can thrive together—not just coexist

BY [JEFF FARRAH](#)

October 26, 2023 at 12:25 PM EDT





California Gov. Gavin Newsom recently vetoed legislation that would have effectively banned autonomous trucks in the state.

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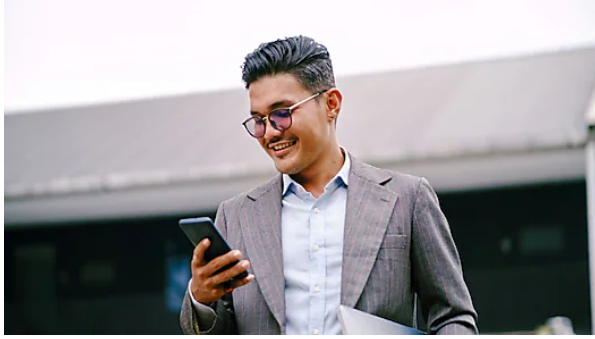
Autonomous vehicles (AVs) have gone from aspiration to game-changing innovation. From California to Texas to Minnesota, more AVs are hitting the roads—and it's not just cars. Autonomous trucks are poised to be part of this big leap forward for the U.S.

Policymakers are taking notice and recognizing the value of driverless trucks in alleviating mounting supply chain challenges. In California, Governor Gavin Newsom recently vetoed legislation that would have effectively banned autonomous trucks in the state, instead allowing the regulatory process to play out under the oversight of the state's top safety experts. The U.S. Congress recently held its first-ever hearing dedicated to autonomous trucks, with rare bipartisan agreement on the technology's promise.

To fulfill the AV technology's economic and safety benefits, we must seize this opportunity and recognize a simple truth: truck drivers and autonomous trucks will thrive together to create a better quality of life for all Americans.

We should all be clear that the U.S. economy *needs* truck drivers, both today and tomorrow. Autonomous trucks won't change that. Our nation's supply chain is barely keeping up with demand—and that's hurting America's farmers, ranchers, and manufacturers who need to get their goods to market. Experts say the supply chain crisis is likely to get worse: Federal data [estimates](#) U.S. freight volume will increase 50% by 2050. This means there will be greater needs—and therefore more opportunities—to move all types of freight. Currently, the U.S. economy faces a [shortage](#) of some 78,000 truck drivers, a constraint expected to double by 2031, according to estimates.

As we look toward the supply chain's next era, the basic statistics show that truck drivers will continue to be needed to haul freight as autonomous trucks fill staffing gaps. The entire market is getting larger, with plenty of opportunities to go around. If you're a truck driver today, you will still be able to be a truck driver tomorrow. Autonomous trucks will not change that.



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At the same time, the autonomous truck industry is creating new and well-paying jobs. A U.S. Department of Transportation-sponsored study [found](#) that autonomous trucking will increase U.S. employment by up to 35,000 jobs per year over the next three decades. Currently, AV companies hire truck drivers with commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) to support testing and development, teaching autonomous trucks to drive safely. Additionally, the industry is creating new jobs such as terminal operators, fleet and vehicle technicians, remote assistance specialists, dispatchers, mapping experts, engineers, and more. These jobs are open to the full spectrum of skills and educational backgrounds.

The AV industry also invests in job training, apprenticeships, and degree programs to support workers entering or transitioning to these new jobs. Programs at schools such as the Pittsburgh Technical College, Montana's Gallatin College, and California's DeAnza College are preparing today's workforce for new jobs in this new economy. Although autonomous trucks perform all aspects of driving, workers are still essential to the AV industry and the supply chain.

That's why the AV industry is working openly and collaboratively with policymakers and truck drivers on sustaining the current workforce while building for the future. Governor Newsom has directed California's Labor and Workforce Development Agency to begin a stakeholder process to address the present and future challenges of autonomous trucks—a forum in which we look forward to participating.

To realize the benefits of AV trucks, we must move past myths and misconceptions. Autonomous trucks will not be everywhere overnight because the technology is rolling out deliberately and intentionally, building relationships within local communities, and prioritizing safety above all. Truck driver jobs will stay an important part of our future, just like they are today. Truck drivers and autonomous trucks will thrive together because they are critical parts of the supply chain that has to meet our ever-increasing demand. The AV industry stands ready to work alongside America's truck drivers—and move the U.S. economy forward together.

Jeff Farrah is the executive director of the Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association.

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