

Colorado falls behind on energy planning

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Colorado could once count itself among national leaders on climate change mitigation and renewable energy. In 2004, citizens voted to approve an initiative establishing a renewable energy standard for qualifying utilities. The legislature has since increased that standard to 30% renewable generation for investor-owned utilities and 20% for large electric co-operatives by 2030.

Now, as governors from three states – California, New York and Colorado – release plans or sign legislation related to climate change and renewable energy, it is clear that Colorado no longer leads on these issues.

Last Wednesday, California Governor Jerry Brown signed SB 350, landmark legislation to increase renewable energy and reduce air pollution. This bill requires California to generate 50% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030. It will double the energy efficiency of homes, offices and factories, and spur the installation of electric vehicle charging stations.

The following day, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announced new climate change commitments for his state. Governor Cuomo joined California in signing the “Under 2 MOU”, a commitment by states and cities worldwide to reduce their emissions 95% below 1990 levels by 2050, which is consistent with a 2 degree Celsius increase in global average temperature.

Governor Cuomo also declared his intention to link the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a cap and trade market reducing emissions in nine Northeastern states, with other markets in California, Quebec and Ontario. Finally, he committed to putting solar on 150,000 homes and businesses by 2020 and to installing renewable energy systems at all 64 State University of New York campuses.

As reported last week by the Denver Post, Governor Hickenlooper presented a Colorado Climate Plan in mid-September that lacks specific emissions reduction goals and proposes no new initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

It’s fair to say that Hickenlooper’s plan is a step backward for Colorado: while Governor Ritter previously had set a goal of 80% emissions reductions by 2050, Hickenlooper’s plan skirts around specifically referencing this goal. Instead, his plan projects that by 2030 Colorado’s emissions will increase 77% from 1990 levels. A projected population increase of 700,000 by 2030 partially accounts

for the increase. Still, Hickenlooper's plan represents a mere 12% reduction in per capita emissions by 2030, according to the 2014 Greenhouse Gas Inventory that his Plan relies on to make projections.

Despite its deficiencies, Hickenlooper's plan asserts that, "Colorado is on the right track." So where will the Governor's business-as-usual approach take Colorado?

Buried in the Plan itself is the answer. Colorado, famous for its beauty in all seasons, is on track for an average temperature rise of more than 6 degrees Fahrenheit by 2050, making seasonal temperatures in Denver most "closely resemble... Albuquerque." Colorado is on track for an average temperature increase of 13 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100.

Our state has already seen some of the devastating effects of climate change: the ravages of pine beetle infestations, more intense floods and more destructive fires. If the Governor wishes to preserve the Colorado we know and love, he should listen to what leaders on climate and renewable energy in New York and California are saying.

Indeed, Governor Hickenlooper should do these states one better and set an emissions reduction goal that is both indisputably safe for the planet and equitable for its inhabitants. He ought to take up the Colorado Coalition for a Livable Climate's recommendation to support limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius and to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. By adopting these ambitious goals, he could establish Colorado as a true climate leader.

Governor Hickenlooper's Energy Office has stressed that its plan is a work in progress. Coloradans should urge the Governor to include goals based in science and concrete actions to achieve those goals in the next version of the plan. States that are "on the right track" – New York and California – have these goals and initiatives. Colorado ought to as well.

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