

Exclusive: Hochul talks energy policy, nuclear plans

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ALBANY -- Governor Kathleen C. Hochul says she's been focused on addressing New York's energy needs since well before she took the top job running the state, and is hoping to significantly expand and strengthen the grid with a plan she described as "bold, borderline audacious."

On Monday, the fifth anniversary of her taking the office, Hochul spoke exclusively with the Watertown Daily Times about her plans to renovate the electrical systems across New York to handle higher energy demand with new, more sustainable forms of power generation.

"My responsibility that I've held for five years now is to ensure that we protect New Yorkers in every sense of the word, and that includes protecting our energy future," Hochul said in a phone interview. "Literally my first month on the job, I launched a number of initiatives including the Hydro-Quebec initiative, which was going to bring hydroelectric power down from Quebec down to New York City with what I think is the largest underground transmission cable in America."

She said she'd heard of the project, the Champlain Hudson Power Express line, as lieutenant governor for Andrew M. Cuomo, but said it got little attention from the administration then.

"I knew, as someone who'd spent eight years as lieutenant governor traveling the state, hearing concerns and seeing opportunities, I was in a position to immediately launch and facilitate this," she said.

The ribbon-cutting for that project was held on June 16; that project will help to restore a large portion of the carbon-free energy for New York City that was lost when the Indian Point nuclear plant in Westchester County was shut down in 2021. But Hochul said she doesn't want to rely exclusively on imported electricity - a statement she made [just as Ontario Premier Doug Ford told the press](#) he believes that Canadians should consider cutting off their energy exports to the U.S. as trade talks between the two nations fell apart.

The issue of increasing demand, projected to spike as new, large manufacturing facilities and AI data centers open across the state, has remained throughout Hochul's tenure as Governor. [State officials](#) and the [groups that run the power grid](#) are for the first time in decades

projecting that the demand for electricity will increase statewide, even as they warn of decreasing capacity to generate that electricity.

So now, officials are focused on building up new generation capacity in-state and upgrading the aging transmission network to carry the power more efficiently and to new places. Hochul's deputy energy secretary Sean Ewart said it's a major focus in Hochul's office, [speaking with the Watertown Daily Times in July](#).

"You could be forgiven for, during the 2010s, thinking that the state was going to achieve its decarbonization goals by just having industry leave," he said at the time.

But he credited Hochul for bringing back large manufacturers; Micron's massive four-factory plan for Onondaga County, plus the smaller-scale expansions at other facilities across the state including Corning's specialized facility in St. Lawrence County to supplement the Micron plant. There's also a slate of new dairy processing facilities, including the massive Chobani plant planned to be the largest single-site food processing plant in the country, and a series of advanced manufacturing and aerospace companies building out new sites in Western and downstate New York.

To meet these needs, Hochul has said she is using an "all of the above" approach; building out new low- and no-carbon power plants, maintaining existing power plants and tweaking existing state clean energy policies. This year, [Hochul pushed through a series of changes to the state's Climate Act](#) that moved the statutory deadline by which the state has to issue new regulations for a carbon tax program, something the Governor warned could drive costs up by thousands of dollars for New Yorkers.

Energy costs in New York are already among the highest in the region, and voters regularly rate the cost of living and utilities specifically as among their top concerns. Hochul said she believes an "all of the above" energy approach is the best way to balance affordability, reliability and environmental concerns.

"I want to put us in a place where we can focus on affordability; the more supply we have with the all of the above approach and the more energy sources we have, the more we can focus and be successful in driving down the cost of living in this state, starting with people's utility bills," she said.

Hochul said she still believes in building a green, carbon-free energy grid, but said that the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain interruptions, inflation, the Trump administration's hostility to wind and solar projects and ongoing trade wars have all made the timeline initially laid out in the Climate Act less possible.

“I’m making sure that we fulfill our responsibilities, we have to focus on a clean energy future,” she said. “But knowing the setbacks we’ve had with the pandemic, and then some of our options were foreclosed upon or are being hampered by the Trump administration aggressively trying to step in and halt our efforts.”

The Trump administration has thrown out a series of obstacles that have all but killed some of the largest green-energy projects that were underway in New York; the administration paid billions to two companies to stop the construction of off-shore wind projects off Long Island, and the federal Environmental Protection Agency has raised questions over solar projects using agricultural land across upstate New York.

Those challenges, as well as the tariffs the President has enacted raising the costs of new solar and wind projects have slowed, but not entirely stopped, their construction across New York.

Hochul said she expects, especially with the recent flare-up in the trade war between the U.S. and Canada, that challenges to building these facilities will continue to stick around for a while longer. Even still, Hochul said these projects are important to building a sustainable, reliable power grid.

“It is doable, but I need a federal government that’s on our side, not thwarting our efforts by literally paying billions of dollars to companies to not build offshore wind,” she said.

Hochul said that nuclear power was one area that she saw potential collaboration with President Trump and his administration, where progress could be made on carbon-free power. She said the issue came up in their first call after his reelection in November of 2024.

“I said ‘I will stand up and fight you whenever you are hurting New York state, always have, always will, but there are also areas of alignment, like nuclear, where we can cooperate’,” Hochul said.

She pointed to the nuclear approval process which is rated to take about 10 years from first application to complete; seven of those years are spent seeking the proper federal approvals. Hochul said she asked Trump to consider addressing that long lead time, while still keeping safety “top of mind.”

The plan has its supporters; upstate lawmakers and their constituencies who hope to see the plants built in their communities bringing jobs and tax dollars, nuclear developers who want

their companies to be picked to build and operate the facilities, the unions who want more jobs in the area.

[But it's also facing steep pushback](#) from some Democratic state lawmakers, environmental groups and the anti-nuclear lobby. Those in the opposition raise concerns over the potential impacts of a nuclear disaster, repeating some of the concerns that led former Governor Cuomo to shut down Indian Point.

Some raise concerns over the price of new nuclear facility and the inevitable years-long process to build a new power plant with the technology; they point to the latest American-built nuclear plants in Georgia that have cost ratepayers many millions more dollars than originally projected.

But Hochul said she flatly does not take those concerns into consideration. She's used her power as Governor to direct nuclear development without approval from the legislature, using money budgeted for general electrical development and managed by state authorities. The legislature has taken no vote to support nuclear development specifically, and some influential state legislators like Senate Energy Committee Chair Kevin S. Parker, D-Brooklyn have pushed to pass nuclear moratorium bills, thus-far ineffectively.

"Opposition comes with the job, with everything I do," she said. "It has never held me back from doing what I believe is right," she said. "As an upstater, and someone who has spent my life in public service, I have good instincts, very strong instincts on what policies will be most beneficial for New York. So I don't pay attention to the opposition, and I will be successful with this."

The 'nuclear backbone' project is also relying on federal tax credits for nuclear developments, and will require that construction start by 2032 in order to benefit from those credits. If all five gigawatts of new power come online, Hochul said it will be the most new nuclear development seen in more than 30 years anywhere in the U.S.

"That is bold, borderline audacious, but that's how I operate," Hochul said. "That is the hallmark of my leadership, and I'm not afraid of a big challenge. The bigger the challenge, the more I lean into it, because these are the projects no one else really has the courage to stand up and do."

She said she has confidence in the nuclear industry of today, the advances made in the technology and especially the small modular nuclear reactor technology being trialed and rolled out right now.

“The technology has evolved so dramatically, it does take less time, it is far safer, and exploring small modular reactors, I think they’re the way of the future alongside large-scale reactors,” she said.

Hochul said that her team is currently waiting for the federal Department of Energy to issue five low-interest long-term loans that will help to finance these projects. Hochul said she’s had conversations with the Secretary of Energy, Secretary of the Interior and with the President directly to express how important these projects are, but said even without the federal support these projects will move forward.

“I want this to happen, and they will be a great partner, but either way we’re moving forward,” she said.