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Energy

House committee moves RGGI bill closer to full vote



RECOMMENDED

The Bruce Mansfield coal-fired power plant as seen on May 30, 2018. The coal-fired power plants in Pennsylvania that have remained after the Mansfield plant's closing will be under increasing pressure if Pennsylvania joins the carbon trading program RGGI.

PAUL J. GOUGH

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By Paul J. Gough – Reporter, Pittsburgh Business Times

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Legislation that would allow the General Assembly to

Protection
Company

Pam Snyder
Person

More

vote to keep Pennsylvania out of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative was approved Tuesday morning by the House Environmental Resources and Energy Committee. It now moves to the full House, where a similar bill passed there and the Senate before being vetoed by Gov. Wolf last year.

The vote on [House Bill 637](#) was 17-8, with all of the committee's Republicans and two Democrats, state Rep. [Pam Snyder](#), D-Greene County, and state Rep. [Manuel Guzman](#), D-Berks

County, voting
in favor. The
other
Democrats
opposed it.

It's the latest
battle in the
war over RGGI,
a carbon
trading
program that
northeastern
states have
joined that is
designed to
limit carbon
dioxide
pollution from
fossil-fuel-
fired power
plants.

Advocates for
the coal
industry, both
mines and the
power plants
that are
mainly in
western
Pennsylvania,
say that
joining RGGI
will drive
them out of
business.

They're joined
in the effort by
the GOP-led
General

Assembly as well as many Pennsylvania labor unions whose members work in or with the coal industry. But RGGI's supporters, along with Gov. Tom Wolf, say Pennsylvania needs to do more to move into the energy future and that the proceeds from the carbon-trading auctions will go to help energy efficiency and communities hurt by coal-related closures.

Wolf and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection are aiming to join RGGI in 2022, and a big vote by the

Environmental
Quality Board
to approve the
draft
regulations
authorizing
the workings
of RGGI will
likely occur in
the fall. HB
637 would
require the
DEP to hold
four public
hearings all
over
Pennsylvania
on RGGI and
then force
legislative
action to
approve taxes
or fees on
carbon
emissions. Its
prime sponsor
Rep. James
Struzzi,
R-Indiana
County, told
the committee
before the
vote that the
General
Assembly and
by extension
Pennsylvania
residents,
have been

circumvented
from having a
say in whether
Pennsylvania
should join
RGGI.

“Simply, it’s
been rubber
stamped,”
Struzzi said.
“To me, that’s
unacceptable.”
He was joined
by Chair [Daryl
Metcalf](#),
R-Butler
County, who
said no other
state had
joined RGGI
without the
approval of
the
Legislature.

Struzzi said
neither Wolf
nor the DEP
secretary had
been to
Indiana
County to
explain the
plan to help
the region if
the two coal-
fired power
plants in his
district shut

down.

Another
lawmaker,
Snyder, has
large coal
mines in her
district of
Greene County
and she
remembers
what it was
like when
FirstEnergy
shut down its
coal-fired
plant there last
decade.

“I know the
devastation
that caused to
the people, my
neighbors, my
friends,”
Snyder, a
Democrat,
said. “Let me
be clear: I care
deeply about
the
environment,
contrary to
what some
people may
believe. But I
also care about
the
socioeconomic
environment.”
Snyder said the
environment

Freedom of Speech

coal mines
serve to bolster
American
energy
independence.

“We need
everything in
this
commonwealth
and in this
country to be
energy
independent,”
Snyder said.

“We need solar.
We need wind
We need
nuclear. We
need gas and,
whether you
believe it or
not, we need
coal. When you
have an energy
emergency,
you’re going to
wish you had
coal, because
that’s the fuel
that can ramp
up and ramp
down
immediately.”

But other
Democrats on
the committee
pushed back on

Struzzi's contention that there hadn't been enough public comment and criticized the reason for the bill.

"This bill has one intent in my view, and that is to kill RGGI, to block RGGI," said Democratic Chair Greg Vitali, D-Delaware County. "And it's also their opinion we need to act quickly and deliberately to address it."

RGGI "will save jobs and will create jobs," Vitali said. He noted that the Beaver Valley Nuclear Station, owned by Energy Harbor, remained open in the face of a

threatened
closure
because of the
prospect of
RGGI's focus
on clean
energy
generation.

State Rep.
Dianne Herrin,
D-Chester
County, said
RGGI wasn't
killing the coal
industry.

"The main
driver behind
the loss of coal
jobs is natural
gas," Herrin
said. "Natural
gas is
incredibly
cheap because
there is such a
surplus and it
is by far the
largest build (of
power plants)
at the utility
level."

State Rep. Tim
O'Neal,
D-Washington
County, and
state Rep. Josh
Kail, R-Beaver

County, said
jobs would be
lost in western
Pennsylvania
without any
attendant drop
in air pollution
because the
fossil fuel
generation
would just be
picked up by
Ohio and West
Virginia. Kail
said the state
shouldn't pick
winners and
losers in an
industry, and
doubted
western
Pennsylvania
wouldn't
benefit
economically
"The bottom
line is that
what people
are really
talking about
are jobs being
created
somewhere
else, jobs
probably in
another
country," Kail
said. "They
are not going
to be jobs in

my district,
they are not
going to be
jobs in
western
Pennsylvania,
they are not
going to be
jobs in Rep.
Struzzi's
district.”

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