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# RGGI will reduce carbon emissions and bring millions to Pennsylvania. This shouldn't be a fight. | Editorial

By joining a regional cap-and-trade program in 2022, Pennsylvania could cut carbon emissions at least 25.5% by 2030—and generate new revenue and jobs.

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The Bruce Mansfield power plant, left, in Shippingport, Pa., is seen from across the Ohio River from Industry, Pa. on Thursday, Oct. 3, ... **Read more**  
Keith Srakocic / AP

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by The Editorial Board  
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The climate crisis is already [hitting Pennsylvania](#), raising temperatures and increasing our days of extreme heat alongside the impact of floods and landslides — but some lawmakers are forcing an old debate that will lead to no action at all.

That's the only conclusion an honest observer could draw from the [effort to block Pennsylvania from joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative](#) (RGGI) — a compact of 11 New England and Mid-Atlantic states, with over a decade-long track record, to reduce carbon emissions and bring home revenue.

RGGI is a carbon emission cap-and-trade program — not a new or radical idea. It sets a total carbon allowance for power plants operating within states that belong to the compact. A power plant then can either transition toward cleaner energy or buy CO2 allowances, with revenues from these purchases going back to RGGI states.

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In October 2019, Gov. Tom Wolf signed an executive order instructing the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to start drafting regulations to join RGGI. For nearly two years, the DEP has been going through a long regulatory process with multiple stakeholders — including the legislature.

The DEP estimates that by joining RGGI in 2022, Pennsylvania would be able to cut carbon emissions by at least [25.5% by 2030](#). Considering that Pennsylvania accounts for nearly [1% of greenhouse gas emissions](#) worldwide, that reduction could have global significance.

What makes RGGI appetizing to states, and should to Pennsylvania, is that revenue from the purchase of power allowances goes right back to the state. The program has so far brought in more than [\\$139 million for New Jersey](#) to invest in clean energy and emission reduction in 2021 alone. DEP estimates that RGGI will bring the [commonwealth nearly \\$2 billion](#) and net 30,000 jobs between 2022 and 2030.

Revenue, jobs, better health, reduced emissions — these are the opportunities the state Senate is trying to block in Pennsylvania.

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On June 14, the Senate passed a bill advertised by Republicans as “[requiring Legislative Approval for Imposing a Carbon Tax](#).” Although RGGI does not include such a tax, the bill is an effort to prevent Pennsylvania from joining the compact under the guise of legislators wanting to be involved. A similar bill passed both chambers in September 2020, and [was rightly vetoed by Gov. Wolf](#). But the current bill has received more Democratic support in the Senate — including from Philadelphia’s Sen. Tina Tartaglione — and is now going to the House.

Sen. Gene Yaw, the Republican chair of the Environmental Resources and Energy Committee who discloses income from oil and gas companies [year after year](#), claims RGGI would put “[hardworking Pennsylvanians out of work](#).” That is exactly the kind of backward-looking view that leaves workers in polluting plants vulnerable to their jobs’ inevitable disappearance. The operator of the [Cheswick Generating Station](#), a coal-fired power plant outside of Pittsburgh, announced the plant’s closure this month — along with closures of coal plants in Ohio and Maryland, only the latter a RGGI state.

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Inaction abandons workers. RGGI and investment in the transition to clean energy manages the decline.

RGGI is also merely one starting point for mitigating the climate crisis. It addresses just one type of emissions (carbon) in one type of sector (power). RGGI does nothing to tackle, for example, methane — a greenhouse gas that leaks from fracking wells and traps more heat in the atmosphere than does CO2. Following a recent study on the impact of methane emissions, the executive director of the [United Nations Environment Programme](#) said: “Cutting methane is the strongest lever we have to slow climate change over the next 25 years.”

**As long as even a tested, market-based, cap-and-trade program meets such vigorous opposition, Pennsylvania will be stuck in the polluting past.**

Instead of debating RGGI, Pennsylvania should join speedily, and the legislature should debate how to most equitably use the revenue both to support those who work in polluting plants and [to address environmental injustice](#). Then the state could address the big-ticket items: how to move away from fracking and liquefied natural gas pipelines to reduce methane emissions.

The opportunities of investment in renewable energy and infrastructure improvements go well beyond the

meets such vigorous opposition, Pennsylvania will be stuck in the polluting past — not doing its part to protect its own residents, nor its fair share for the rest of the world.

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**The Inquirer Editorial Board**  
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