



The organizers said the main goals of the event were to persuade Andrew Cuomo to block all new natural gas infrastructure in the state, including pipelines and power plants; move toward 100 percent renewable energy, and tax emissions to fund the transition. | AP Photo

## Rally targets Cuomo over natural gas infrastructure, renewables progress

By **MARIE J. FRENCH** | 04/23/2018 05:27 PM EDT

ALBANY — Environmental activists marched to the state Capitol on Monday to push Gov. Andrew Cuomo to block all new natural gas infrastructure and set a more-ambitious goal to transition the state's economy off fossil fuels.

About a thousand demonstrators walked from the site of a proposed natural gas plant in Albany's Sheridan Hollow neighborhood to the Capitol. The event attracted Cuomo's Democratic primary challenger, Cynthia Nixon; Karenna Gore, daughter of former Vice President Al Gore; and community groups from across the state.

During a rally at the Capitol, some demonstrators attacked Cuomo personally. "You're being a coward," Geovaira Hernandez, an organizer with PUSH Buffalo, said of Cuomo. "It is time you become a leader ... You say you want to be president but you can't even take care of the people in your own state." (Cuomo is thought to be considering a presidential campaign in 2020 but has never said he wants to be president.)

POLITICOMAGAZINE

**WHATWORKSNEXT**

PRESENTED BY

JPMORGAN CHASE & CO



The organizers said the main goals of the event were to persuade Cuomo to block all new natural gas infrastructure in the state, including pipelines and power plants; move toward 100 percent renewable energy, and tax emissions to fund the transition. Local groups also protested individual natural gas projects in their communities.

Cuomo has set a goal to reach 50 percent renewable electricity by 2030 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions 40 percent by that year and 80 percent by 2050. Activists have said that's not enough and are pushing to move the state off fossil fuels entirely — including to heat homes, power cars and fuel electric generation.

"We're calling on him to take real action, not just nice words," Food and Water Watch's Alex Beauchamp said.

Nixon, who did not speak as part of the event but did snap photos with rally participants and held a "Climate Justice" banner, criticized Cuomo's environmental record. She's said she wants to craft a plan to move off fossil fuels by 2050. That would require banning cars, trucks and other modes of transportation with internal combustion engines and moving the 60 percent of homes that rely on natural gas for heat to a different energy source.

Nixon said she supports a carbon tax and a legislative measure to require the state to develop a plan to move to 100 percent renewables. She also wants to shut down the state's nuclear power plants, which provide about 34 percent of electricity used in New York.

"Nuclear power is not a bridge to a cleaner energy economy," she said. "Fracked gas is not a bridge to a cleaner energy economy."

The former "Sex and the City" actor has also embraced a ban on any new infrastructure for natural gas, one of the priorities for the rally.

A spokeswoman for the governor's campaign, Abbey Fashouer, defended Cuomo in a written statement. "The governor has led the nation in combating climate change from banning fracking to one of the most aggressive clean energy standards in the country to closing down dangerous Indian Point to the single largest procurement of renewable energy in our nation's history and the first multi-state cap and trade system to lower carbon pollution," she said. "We welcome anyone to this critical effort as we work to protect our environment for future generations and create a cleaner, greener New York."

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which caps emissions from the electric generation sector, was initiated by former Republican Gov. George Pataki. The initiative negotiated a lowering of the cap, which

POLITICOMAGAZINE

WHATWORKSNEXT

PRESENTED BY

JPMORGAN CHASE &amp; CO



A spokesperson for the governor's campaign on Friday said the governor had placed a moratorium on new natural gas pipelines in the state. The spokesperson on Monday clarified that the governor has not approved any new pipelines.

The administration has blocked water quality permits for some new pipelines, including the Constitution Pipeline and — on Friday — the Northeast Supply Enhancement Project that would run through the New York Bay and supply natural gas to National Grid in New York City. The company seeking to build the project, Williams, plans to re-apply for that permit, according to a company spokesman.

Any ban on new natural gas pipelines, particularly interstate ones that are regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, would face legal challenges, according to two attorneys who work on permitting for pipelines and other energy projects.

“The idea of putting a ban or moratorium on interstate pipelines — the state just doesn’t have that authority,” said Adam Schultz, an attorney with Couch White. Even a ban on pipelines that run exclusively inside New York would face a challenge, said Yvonne Hennessey, a partner at Barclay Damon.

Cuomo's administration has been overruled once by FERC and federal courts for denying a permit to the 7.8-mile Millennium Valley Lateral pipeline to supply a natural gas plant in Orange County. FERC ruled the state had taken too long to deny a permit for the project, abdicating its limited authority under the Clean Water Act to address the water quality impacts of interstate pipelines.

The governor's Department of Environmental Conservation has issued permits for natural gas pipelines that are mostly within existing rights-of-way and entail increasing the capacity of existing systems with pipeline or compressor station upgrades. That includes the Eastern System Upgrade, a 7.8-mile project, in 2017 which was partly outside existing right-of-way, and the Spectra Algonquin Incremental Market in 2015, which included a new crossing of the Hudson River, among others.

"DEC subjects all applications for permits to the strictest environmental standards with public input at every step and will deny any permit that negatively impacts the environment," spokesman Sean Mahar said in a statement.

