Pragmatic Environmentalist of New York Summary Update December 25, 2023 to January 7, 2024

This is the latest summary update of my recent posts at Pragmatic Environmentalist of New York. I have been writing about the pragmatic balance of the risks and benefits of environmental initiatives in New York since 2017 with a recent emphasis on New York's Climate Leadership & Community Protection Act (Climate Act). This summary describes each of my recent posts with minimal technical jargon but includes links if you want to read the entire post. If you do not want to be on this mailing list then let me know. Previous updates and a pdf copy of the following information are also available.

New Year's Resolution – Methane Response

I wrote an article for Watts Up With That that described my New Year's resolution: I resolve that when I hear anyone say that methane is more potent than carbon dioxide because the radiative forcing produced is greater, I will say that is only true in the laboratory on a dry molecular basis. In the atmosphere, where it counts, methane is not nearly as potent.

This is important because the Climate Act vilifies natural gas which contains between 70-90% of the methane chemical. In the Climate Act methane is irrationally disparaged as part of the war on natural gas. The rationale used always revolves around the potency of methane relative to CO2. I believe that the preponderance of information shows that the argument is incorrect. I have developed a page that consolidates reasons why methane should not be vilified and this post summarized those arguments.

In brief, the laboratory tests that are used to determine the relative impacts of different greenhouse gases on radiation forcing compare molecules in a dry laboratory. In the atmosphere concentrations matter, moisture is present which moisture overwhelm any effects of methane, and the differences in atmospheric radiation effects of methane relative to CO2 reduces the potential impact. I showed that methane does not have greater impacts on the greenhouse gas effect than carbon dioxide and should not be treated as mandated by the Climate Act

Someday Scrooge Will Say No

Richard Ellenbogen recently sent an email to his distribution that highlighted an inevitable problem with New York State's net-zero mandate of the Climate Act. The plan is to electrify everything possible using renewable energy. That brings up the problem that the local electric distribution system is not up to the task, so it is likely that electric use could be limited at times in New York's future.

Ellenbogen describes the record setting Christmas light show and its effect on the neighborhood electric system. Neighbors enjoy the show but for years could not use their washing machine or dishwasher while the lights were on. The problem was resolved when the electric company put in a new transformer.

Ellenbogen compares the energy use of the light show with heat pumps and electric vehicle chargers. He explains:

> The point is that if the utility system can't support a Christmas display, even a large one, and allow the neighbors to wash their clothes at the same time, how is it going to support the massive load of heat pumps and vehicle charging that is being mandated. That combination will far exceed the demand of a Christmas light display. As I have mentioned previously, every transformer in the state is going to have to be replaced or have their service upgraded as occurred at the home in the article. The problem is that there is an acute transformer shortage along with a shortage of electricians and utilities are worried about having a sufficient number of transformers to recover after a bad storm, let alone having enough to rebuild the entire system.

Ellenbogen mentions that he wants to send a magic wand to the Public Service Commission to help them with the Climate Act transition because they are going to need all the help that they can get: "Since math and science have been thrown out the window in New York State, we might as well turn to the occult."

Righteous Risks and the Climate Act

It has always been puzzling to me when people who should know better completely ignore anything that runs contrary to their climate change risk or clean energy solutions narratives. David Zaruk, writing at the Risk Monger blog, has started a series of articles that offers great insight into motives for those people.

The Introduction to a series of articles describes righteous risks as follows:

> **Righteous Risks**
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> The threat of harm to societal well-being arising from a value-based policy approach that filters out facts and data within an ethical perspective. Decisions are influenced by what is perceived as ethical rather than what is rational or scientific.
>
> Righteous risks are common in affluent policy arenas driven more by moral idealism than pragmatic solutions. It is often found where activists and influential media groups have license to impose their dogma upon others.
>
> *Righteous Risks: Introduction*

The introductory post expands on his description of righteous risks. He explains the peril of "making decisions solely on some ethical dogma, an unwavering virtuous self-appreciation or a fear of some stakeholder moral condemnation" is that policies lead to "irrational regulations that do little but harm." My post supplemented his observations with relevant examples from New York.

For example, the following description is entirely apropos to New York's Climate Act proponents:

> The zealot influencer is the most dangerous lobbyist in the field, excelling at generating outrage optics within a small tribe of loud activists. They use a sociopathic preacher zeal to push policymakers into a moral quagmire. Support this legislation and you are supporting industry, wilfully spreading cancer on innocent children and destroying the environment. The argument is not about evidence or scientific advice, but on whether you, as a leader, are a good person. Outrage optics campaigns work on the idea that people will forget a policy choice in weeks but will never forget an irresponsible leader in the pocket of evil industry. When this emotional quagmire is too difficult and the moral outrage too insufferable, the precautionary principle is introduced as a mea culpa.

New York's perfect example of a zealot influencer is Raya Salter. She is the founder of Energy Justice Law & Policy Center and is a member of the Climate Action Council. In an article I wrote about the tradeoffs between reliability and peaking power plants I noted that she never misses an opportunity to emphasize her belief that these facilities are a root cause of air quality health impacts in New York City disadvantaged communities. In a recent Equity and Climate Justice Roundtable session, she argued that the New York Cap-and-Invest program should make shutting down the peaking units a priority. She believes that equity is only achieved when fossil plant emissions are zero saying that "Anything less than shutting down power plants is a distraction from the goals of the Climate Act". However, she also says getting to zero must be done "in a way that prioritizes emissions and co-pollutant reductions in front line communities and does not disproportionately burden disadvantaged communities". The scariest thing is that no one in the Hochul Administration has ever challenged her claims and demands.

New York RGGI Operating Plan Amendment 2024

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) is a market-based program to reduce emissions from electric generating units. This technical post describes my comments on the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA) Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) Operating Plan Amendment ("Amendment") for 2024. I will not subject readers to the details.

What you need to know is that the State of New York has consistently allocated RGGI auction proceeds inconsistent with the stated goals of the RGGI operating plan program. As long as other factors decreased emissions then this failure had no impact on RGGI program emission reduction goals. However, the emission reduction low-hanging fruit are gone. Now investments in cost-effective and efficient emission reductions are needed for further reductions. The failure of the 2024 RGGI operating plan to recognize this need and emphasize emission reduction programs could very well mean that the Climate Act emission reduction targets will not be achieved.

The State wants to implement a similar program that covers all energy sectors of the economy but are ignoring the historical results that show the State of New York has collected over $2 billion in revenues over the last 15 years and has very little to show for it. This will go from bad to worse.

Articles of Note January 7, 2024

The most recent summary of articles of note covered a range of topics relevant to the Climate Act. An article at the Institute for Energy Research titled "Spain Increases its Renewable Share but Soon May Need to Replace its Windmills" highlights the aggressive renewable energy transition for Spain. There are lessons to be learned for New York. Spain has developed manufacturing capacity for wind turbines but competition from China is causing enormous losses. Making New York energy more expensive and then expecting to be able to compete with a country that doesn't is a recipe for disaster.

An article about assessing the bird and bat deaths associated with wind turbines noted that there are some operating limitations that can be used to reduce impacts. I wish I thought that New York would incorporate them into their contracts but have no expectations.

This week expect to hear an announcement about billion dollar disasters to support the claim that all U.S. disaster costs are attributable to climate change. However, Roger Pielke, Jr. has submitted a paper that argues that:

> The NOAA billion dollar disaster dataset comprehensively falls short of NOAA's guidelines for scientific integrity. The shortfalls documented here are neither small nor subtle. They represent a significant departure from NOAA's long-term history of scientific integrity and excellence, which has saved countless lives and facilitated the nation's economy. A course correction is in order.

Finally, I linked to the Press Release – Empire Wind 2 Offshore Wind Project Reset. The project is supposed to develop 1,260 MW of offshore wind but on January 3 developers announced that they were going to terminate the Offshore Wind Renewable Energy Certificate (OREC) Agreement. New York State has given renewable energy developers the opportunity to get more money from New Yorkers and this project is the latest example of developers who leapt at the chance. Now the question is whether the Hochul Administration's will reassess the cost impacts to New Yorkers. Do not hold your breath given that nothing has been provided to date.