Pragmatic Environmentalist of New York Summary Update January 27, 2025 – February 9, 2025
This is a summary update of posts at Pragmatic Environmentalist of New York over the last two weeks. 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 and 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. A pdf copy of the following information and previous summaries are also available. The opinions expressed in these articles do not reflect the position of any of my previous employers or any other organization I have been associated with, these comments are mine alone.

Climate Act Costs Mal-information
Media Defence defines three false information terms:

- Disinformation: Disinformation is information that is false, and the person who is disseminating it knows it is false. "It is a deliberate, intentional lie, and points to people being actively disinformed by malicious actors".
- Misinformation: Misinformation is information that is false, but the person who is disseminating it believes that it is true.
- Mal-information: Mal-information is information that is based on reality, but it is used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country.

I evaluated these terms with respect to the Climate Act transition. I did not address disinformation, but there are examples of misinformation and mal-information on the record in the Scoping Plan process.

I have written about misinformation before. Climate Act authors claimed the conversion to renewable energy had no reliability challenges that could not be overcome with existing technology. The Climate Action Council members who dismissed anyone who disagreed with this tenet as purveyors of misinformation were clearly wrong. I have documented that experts, including those that are responsible for electric system reliability, agree that a new category of generating resources called Dispatchable Emissions-Free Resources (DEFR) is necessary during extended periods of low wind and solar resource availability. The fact that this requirement was included in the Integration Analysis and Co-Chair Seggos did not call out the CAC members who claimed that no new technologies would be needed and allowed them to enter those statements in the record is clear misinformation.

Governor Hochul's executive budget described in the FY2026 NYS Executive Budget Book stated that "Acknowledging that the cost of inaction greatly outweighs the cost of any actions we can take together, New York will continue to pursue an aggressive agenda in transitioning to a sustainable green energy economy" . This is mal-information. I believe that the Hochul Administration wanted to be able to say that implementing the Climate Act would be beneficial. NYSERDA conjured up support for the sound bite "The costs of inaction are more than the costs of action" that has been the mantra of the Administration. However, that statement is misleading and inaccurate. I summarized the machinations based on reality used to mislead and harm New York and fully documented them in my verbal

comments and in my written comments on the Draft Scoping Plan. Those comments have never been acknowledged and that reveals a flaw in the stakeholder process.

I concluded that the Hochul Administration pitches a fit and throws around the misinformation label when anyone says something contrary to their narrative. They are not only guilty of pushing misinformation but worse, they spout egregious mal-information whenever they claim the costs of inaction are more than the costs of action.

Ellenbogen and Caiazza Comments on DPS Definitions

On November 4, 2024, the Department of Public Service (DPS) staff proposed definitions for two key components of the 2040 zero emissions Climate Act target. This article summarizes the comments that Richard Ellenbogen and I filed yesterday that argued that New York's net-zero implementation process should be paused until issues like battery safety are resolved.

The battery safety section included the analysis posted here describing the impacts of an evacuation zone in New York City if there was a fire at the proposed Ravenswood battery storage facility. We also argued that New York still has no comprehensive plan, that any batteries built today are not needed because wind and solar which will not be available in New York City in large quantities for many years, and until the State decides on which magical dispatchable emissions-free resource they plan to use, any batteries built are a false solution that might not be needed.

How the Green Energy Narrative Confuses the Climate Act

Russ Schussler, aka the Planning Engineer, has published an article discussing the narrative around the green energy transition that is a prominent component of the Climate Act. Schussler describes the story line used by proponents of wind and solar or green energy:

> The green energy narrative works somewhat like a magician's patter, overemphasizing many things of irrelevance and distracting the audience from the important things going on. Misdirection ensures small truths are misinterpreted and magnified, leading to completely unrealistic hopes and expectations.
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> For example, there have been many simple studies examining how much energy might be produced by a green resource, or set of green resources, such as wind and solar power. These studies ignore important issues such as deliverability, timing, reliability and costs. Based on simple studies, the media, activists and policy makers frequently conclude that such resources can be used near universally on a large scale to provide electric service to consumers effectively, efficiently, and economically.

This is precisely what happened in New York when the Climate Act authors developed the targets and mandates of the law. Schussler explains the problem with this argument:

> In the green energy narrative costs have been demonstrated, environmental impacts have been demonstrated, reliability has been demonstrated, deliverability has been demonstrated and all

> shown to possibly work, BUT NOT AT THE SAME TIME. In the eyes of many, such demonstrations cumulatively strengthen the green energy narrative. However, the gullible audience will be shocked when wind, solar and batteries are not at all well suited to support electric generation on their own.

He goes on to describe three tricks of the green energy narrative: misleading language, false problems, and narrative control. The false problems trick is notable. My readers know that I think that wind and solar intermittency is a fatal flaw to the New York transition. Schussler argues that this challenge might be overcome while acknowledging privately to me that the cost hurdle is probably insurmountable. His conclusion however is that "the real problem is that wind, solar and batteries do not readily provide essential reliability services necessary to support the grid." He explains why this challenge is so great that it will likely never get resolved no matter how much money is spent. Same result, different reason.

Schussler and I agree that it is becoming increasingly apparent that wind, solar and batteries when pursued at high penetration levels result in high costs, lower reliability and poorer operational outcomes. He points out that "Expectations from the green energy narrative and real-world results are not consistent and this gulf will continue to widen as long as policy makers continue to reflexively buy into the green energy narrative."

Climate Whiplash and California Wildfires

The difference between weather and climate is constantly mistaken by Climate Act advocates and has been the subject of articles at my blog. Recently Southern California wildfires have been blamed on climate change. Patrick Brown addressed the question how much "Climate Whiplash" impacted the Los Angeles fires. His excellent analysis destroys a claim that there was a significant climate-change related cause for the fires.

The reason I wanted to highlight Brown's analysis of this paper is because he highlights a key complication for the general public's understanding of climate change. It is accepted that a warmer climate increases moisture in the atmosphere and, counter intuitively, drought severity at the same time. The implications of those mechanisms are important with respect to GHG emission reduction policies. The question is so what? We need to ask what is the magnitude of the change, what impacts might result from these mechanisms, and whether changes in global temperatures due to GHG emissions will result in significant impacts from these mechanisms to make informed policy decisions.

I fully endorse Brown's explanation, especially the statement that I highlighted below:

> However, I like to point out that it is useful to break down lines of evidence in climate science into categories of

1. Historical observations/trends
2. Fundamental theory
3. Mathematical modeling

> I know from teaching the "wet gets wetter, dry gets drier" concept that the evidence for increased variability in the same location is much stronger in the theory and modeling categories than it is in observations. **This is important because observations should take precedence over the other two.** Focusing on observations tells us a lot about *how big* of an effect we're talking about (i.e., do we see major trends emerge through the noise of the observation system and natural variability?). Furthermore, a fundamental point of doing science is to *explain observations*. The canonical order of operations is that first you *observe* some phenomenon, and then you use the tools of theory and modeling to make sense of it.

I cannot over-emphasize the point that observations should take precedence over theory or modeling.

I concluded that people need to understand this important point. There is no question that adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere will result in warming and that the warming will result in "wet gets wetter, dry gets drier". However, Brown shows that the magnitude of these effects is important and that checks based on historical observations indicate that those effects are about the same as natural variability. Whenever I have evaluated similar claims, I found the same result. The claims that recent weather events are caused by climate change are not based on observations.

Current Grid is Not Reliable

It is frustrating to me that emotion-driven ideologues are a primary driver of New York energy policy and given that New York emissions are so small relative to global emissions that reducing emissions will have no effect. One example where ideologues are influencing policy is the PEAK coalition and deference to their belief that "Fossil peaker plants in New York City are perhaps the most egregious energy-related example of what environmental injustice means today." Their arguments are based on selective choice of metrics, poor understanding of air quality health impacts, and ignorance of air quality trends.

The focus of this article is an argument made by Megan Carr, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest who claimed that we need to replace the New York City peaker plants because "the current grid is not reliable". She said:

> When we talk about reliability concerns, we also have to remember that our current grid is not reliable. Having over 70% of our downstate energy generated by fossil fuels that we're buying on a volatile global market that's subject to price spikes is not actually reliable. When we're talking about uncertain economics, the cost of peak electricity in New York City is 1300% higher than the average cost of other electricity in the state. Those are not reasonable economics. That means there are over 600,000 New Yorkers paying over 6% of their annual income in energy payments. That is untenable. Most importantly as Sebastian and Victor already touched on, it is unacceptable because it requires that some of our communities are sacrificed and regularly exposed to harmful air quality which has devastating health effects.

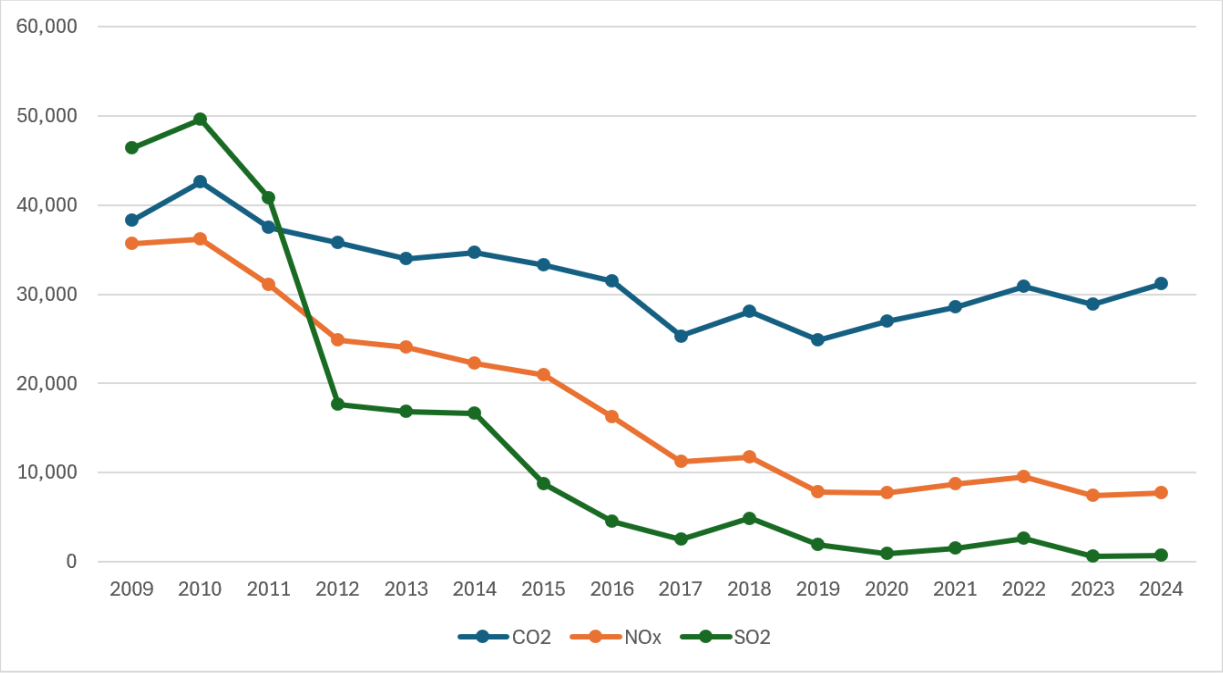
I have never been impressed with the technical background and experience of the ideologues who represent the Peak Coalition. This is exemplified by baseless claims that "We also have to remember that our current grid is not reliable" and "Having over 70% of our downstate energy generated by fossil

fuels that we're buying on a volatile global market that's subject to price spikes is not actually reliable." If the system was not reliable then blackouts would be common. They are not. Fuel prices affect affordability but there is no link to reliability. That biased organizations like this catch the attention of politicians and affect New York policy is a sad commentary on New York energy policy.

New York State Electric Sector Emissions Trends

I summarized the Environmental Protection Agency emissions data for the electric sector in New York to evaluate the trends. All you need to know is shown in the following graph. New York has significantly reduced pollution emissions from the electric sector. However, the reductions were due to fuel switching to natural gas. There are two implications. There are no more significant opportunities to reduce emissions via fuel switching. That means New York State must provide the emission reductions by investments in zero-emissions technology that can displace existing generation. New York's policy decisions for emission reductions have been poor to date. The natural gas fuel switching was driven by the economics of fracking natural gas which drove prices down elsewhere but not in New York because fracking is prohibited. The other emissions policy error was the closure of Indian Point starting in 2019. Emissions have increased since then showing that decision set back emissions progress by years. The Climate Act crash program to replace fossil fuels with wind and solar has shown no sign of emission reduction success.

NYS Emission Trends - SO2 (tons), NOx (tons) & CO2 (1000 tons)



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Commentary on Recent Articles February 9, 2025

I published a summary of articles that I have read that I want to mention but only have time to summarize.

There were three good videos

- Mike Rowe's podcast interviews Alex Epstein to talk about the greatest climate myths and misperceptions.
- John Robson from Climate Discussion Nexus describes the origin of the LA fires.
- Matthew Wielicki notes that alarmists blame every weather event on climate change and explains why this is erroneous in a Prager University video.

Robert Bryce notes that wind energy projects are taking a hammering. He quotes Jason Grumet, the head of the American Clean Power Association who told *Heatmap News* that "probably more than half" of all new wind projects under development in the US could be killed due to President Trump's executive order requiring a "comprehensive assessment" of federal permitting." He also noted that New Jersey canceled plans for another offshore wind solicitation, Danish wind giant Ørsted said it was slashing its planned investments through 2030, and Equinor, Norway's state-owned oil company, said it was slashing its renewable energy targets.

Mark Whitworth describes Vermont's Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA). Incredibly it includes an extraordinary requirement that not even New York has incorporated. Whitworth explains the essence of the GWSA;\: "I'm gonna flap my arms and fly over the Statehouse dome. And if I should fail, I will punch myself in the face." He goes on:

> The "flap my arms and fly" portion of the GWSA is a set of unachievable carbon emissions reduction targets. The "punch myself in the face" part is the GWSA's invitation to sue Vermont at taxpayer expense when the unachievable targets are not met. We will then face the prospect of a judge ordering the Secretary of Vermont's Agency of Natural Resources to make rules that accomplish the impossible. It won't be pretty.

I mentioned two articles about the natural component of climate change. Jamie Jessop explains that two natural climate drivers were the primary drivers of the recent global temperature peak. Matthew Wielicki explains that because during the last interglacial period global temperatures were significantly warmer than today but CO_2 levels were much lower CO_2 levels cannot be the primary driver of global warming.

Meredith Angwin describes the importance of oil generation in New England and includes a nice description of how generating plants are dispatched. In both New England and New York oil-firing provides critical backup. She concludes "we need to think about being overly dependent upon any one fuel".