

Pragmatic Environmentalist of New York Summary Update March 16, 2026 – March 29, 2026

This is a summary update of posts at [Pragmatic Environmentalist of New York](#) for the last two weeks. The intent of this report is to simply summarize my reports and include links if you want to get into the details. 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). 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.

There have been developments associated with suggestions to pause the Climate Act led by Governor Hochul. Her campaign's [energy affordability agenda](#) rings hollow if the Climate Act increases costs. Three Climate Act options are at play. The first is the script-driven 'shock and delay' routine, where the administration first seeded eye-popping Climate Act cost numbers, then played the reluctant savior by proposing changes to the law. The second is the Public Service Commission's [notice](#) requesting comments on the Coalition for Safe and Reliable Energy's petition to hold a hearing to determine whether Public Service Law 66-P Renewable Energy Program obligations impede safe, adequate, and affordable electric service. The last thing is that sooner or later the enormous costs that have been hidden by the Hochul Administration will become common knowledge despite the media ignoring the issue.

[Hochul Claims the Climate Act Can Be Affordable](#)

Never one to allow reality to get in the way of the political message, on March 20, 2026 Governor [Hochul claimed](#) in an exclusive opinion piece in [New York Empire Report](#) that climate action and affordability "can and must" go hand in hand. As part of the political script this announcement introduces her reluctant savior role.

In February the Hochul Administration "[leaked](#)" a New York Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA) [memo](#) that said that "full compliance with New York's 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act could cost upstate households more than \$4,000 a year - on top of what they are already paying today". Addressing this unacceptable cost not only aligns with her energy affordability agenda but also responds to the [State Supreme Court decision](#) that stated either implement the rule or amend the law. The opinion piece outlined the revisions to the law that she apparently intends to include in the upcoming state budget.

This action only addresses the economy-wide [New York Cap-and-Invest](#) (NYCI) regulations. The cost increase described in the memo is exclusively associated with the expected NYCI costs necessary to comply with Climate Act mandates. Hochul claims that these costs are so high that "I am still committed to working toward our targets, with all the stress our residents are under, but New Yorkers expect their elected officials to prioritize affordability." This is utter hypocrisy given that these costs were known in early 2024 when the draft regulations were released. The lower costs proposed at the time were only possible because the regulation included safety valves that released additional allowances to lower costs. However, that approach prevents achieving the Climate Act mandates. I believe that approach would have not achieved compliance so litigation would have followed.

[PSC Commissioner Christian Note Implications](#)

Rory Christian, Chair and CEO of the Public Service Commission (PSC) [recently posted](#) a brief status update regarding the Commission's ability to make changes to the Climate Act. This is associated with the second issue - the Public Service Commission's [notice](#) requesting comments on the Coalition for Safe and Reliable Energy's petition. They requested a hearing to determine whether Public Service Law (PSL) 66-P Renewable Energy Program obligations impede safe, adequate, and affordable electric service. Public reaction and comments submitted by supporters of the Climate Act suggest they mistakenly believe that the petition will mean the end of the Climate Act. Christian explained that the PSC can only make changes to the electric sector targets established in the PSL 66-P. I believe this is part of the political messaging designed to moderate Climate Act supporter reaction.

Christian's note explains:

Specifically, the statute provides that the Commission may temporarily suspend or modify obligations under New York State's renewable energy program — the Clean Energy Standard — if the Commission finds that the program:

- Impedes the provision of safe and adequate electric service;
- Is likely to impair existing obligations and agreements; and/or
- Significantly increases arrears or service disconnections determined to be related to the program.

Even though New York has seen a [significant increase in arrears](#) since the Climate Act was enacted, the Commission has not hold a hearing to address their safe, adequate, and affordable obligations to New Yorkers. Christian notes that the Commission has [finally acknowledged](#) the possible need for a hearing after receiving a petition by the Coalition. The petition is here: <https://lnkd.in/edE92bhF>.

At the time, he noted that comments were due by March 30 but since then the deadline has been postponed until May 1, 2026, at the request of organizations dedicated to the proposition that building as many renewable resources as possible, as fast as possible and hoping it works out is good policy. Delaying reality extends their grift. You can submit comments here: <https://lnkd.in/eVeaJA5Y>. I asked my [readers to submit comments](#) and appreciate the fact that many did. Unfortunately, Climate Act proponents are very effective at submitting comments, so the positive comments were outnumbered by those opposed to the petition who demanded that the PSC "reject any hearing that could weaken" the Climate Act ten to one.

[Total Cost for the Climate Act](#)

The last development is wishful thinking on my part. Someday the enormous costs that have been hidden by the Hochul Administration will become general knowledge and, if there is any justice, the lawmakers who put us on this ruinous path will be held accountable. This post documents my analysis that shows that the total costs from now until 2050 when New York is supposed to reach net-zero nirvana is easily over \$1 trillion. I repeat one trillion dollars!

I based my guess upon data in the State Energy Plan. This required much interpretation and analysis but I determined that I could use the 2030 and 2040 annual net costs in figures 55 and 56 from the State Energy Plan Volume II – Plan Analyses and Impacts [Pathways Analysis](#) for the primary input. I calculated

annual costs simply. For the years between 2030 and 2040 I calculated the rate of change between 2030 and 2040 and interpolated each year. I assumed that 2026 – 2029 costs were the same as 2030. Finally, I extrapolated the observed rate for the years between 2041 and 2050. When I summed up all the annual values I found that the total cost that reflects “what is needed for full achievement of the 2050 emission limit with a smaller gas network” is \$1.18 trillion.

My article goes on to explain all the reasons that estimating total cost is just a guess. In brief,

- The statute hard-codes targets but not a concrete implementation package, so the scope of work keeps changing.
- The Scoping Plan’s Integration Analysis and the State Energy Plan Pathways Analysis do not provide documented, reproducible cost calculations, and the benefit estimates are numerically flawed.
- The PSC’s own reports admit that Climate Act costs cannot be cleanly separated from decades of overlapping programs, and that their tabulations are only partial.
- NYSERDA relies on a “no-action” baseline that excludes necessary existing programs, systematically understating the real burden.
- Household-level cost estimates swing wildly depending on whether you accept the state’s narrow accounting or incorporate the full suite of required measures and charges.

My simple approach yields an approximate cost, but the Hochul Administration never admitted any total cost. Not providing a better number is not an innocent case of “we don’t know yet because it’s early” or “we need better models.” It is a structural outcome of how the Climate Act is written, how agencies have chosen to interpret it, and how the analysis has been framed. The only way for this to change is for the Legislature to revise the Act.

[Syracuse Post Standard Energy Cost Debate](#)

The response and counter-response to a Syracuse Post Standard [article by Tim Knauss](#) explaining energy costs increases illustrates the common over-simplification of this complex topic. State senate candidate James Corl argued in his [response](#) to the article that state energy policies were the cause of the observed high prices. Energy transactional attorney [Chris Reagen responded](#) to Corl stating that “Rising electricity costs are a genuine concern that merits an honest policy discussion grounded in facts rather than convenient scapegoating of renewable energy mandates”. I agree we need honest policy discussions but I showed that Reagen’s reasons supporting renewable energy are flawed.

I recommend Tim Knauss’s [article](#) about the observed increase in energy costs. He pointed out issues that have been raised repeatedly at this blog. Corl pointed out that state energy policies had a role in a short letter restricted by the word limit of a letter to the editor and suggested considering nuclear and protecting natural gas to ultimately reduce costs. However, he was required to leave out details to meet the word limit that Reagen pounced on to try to discredit his arguments.

Reagen is an energy transactional attorney who “works for an international law firm with expertise in all aspects of energy, power and natural resource development.” I believe that his background biased his arguments against nuclear and natural gas. He insinuated that state policies had no effect on energy costs contrary to the [Department of Public Service Informational Report](#) that projected the 2023 Climate Act portion of electric bills ranged between 8.5% and 13.7%. He claimed that nuclear was too expensive

and too slow but apparently does not understand that his preferred alternative must include as yet unproven dispatchable emissions-free ([DEFER](#)) technologies are needed to support the proposed wind and solar buildout. I believe those technologies will take as long to develop, could be more expensive than nuclear, and might not be technically feasible at the end of the day.

The public must understand that there are no easy solutions to increasing electric system costs. Knauss summarized energy affordability issues well. While Corl may have over emphasized the effect of New York energy policies on observed rate increases, Reagen's suggestion that the policies had no effect is incorrect. All their opinions only scratched the surface of the transition challenges in the Climate Act.

[NYISO Winter 2025-2026 Cold Weather Operations – Weather and Loads](#)

Last month I wrote a couple of articles about the January 23-27 winter storm and its [ramifications on a future electric system](#) that depends upon wind and solar. The last two articles summarized here describe New York Independent System Operator (NYISO) documents that extend my previous winter weather analysis through February 9.

A technical presentation titled [Winter 2025-2026 Cold Weather Operations](#) by Aaron Markham, NYISO Vice President Operations provides valuable information but is long on jargon and assumed knowledge. This post attempted to extract the key observations and describe them for the rest of us. Markham's presentation summarized the cold weather event from January 23 through February 9 with these highlights from January 23 – February 9, 2026:

- Coldest stretch of the 2025/2026 winter season with a daily average temperature of 15.2°F.
- Central Park was below freezing from 1/24 to 2/1 (9 days); longest consecutive day stretch since December 2017-January 2018 (14 days)
- Albany was below freezing from 1/23 to 2/10 (19 days); longest consecutive day stretch since January 2011 (21 days)
- Minimum temperature (-0.1° F) occurred on Sunday, February 8th and was the lowest of the season

He went on to describe how this winter weather affected electric loads. In short, electric loads peaked with the cold temperatures. The NYISO was forced to invoke special resources needed during emergencies on eight days that reduced loads but there were still three days that the load reached the expected winter peak. As I noted in my earlier articles the observed lack of solar energy is an important result. It shows that when there was a large snowstorm, all the solar resources in New York produced virtually nothing to support the system at the time there were significant peak loads. Wind performed better but still was only a small component of the total generation on the system.

Governor [Hochul recently claimed](#) that "Since I have been Governor, more than \$88.7 billion has been invested in clean energy through programs that have made us an example for the rest of the nation." I am not sure that investments that produced less than 10% of the total energy production for 17 days during an extremely cold period with high loads is an example anyone else would want to emulate.

[January February 2026 Winter Weather Proves the Need for DEFR](#)

Proponents of the Climate Act as written cling to the belief that no new technologies are needed to implement the law. This year's winter weather and its effects on renewable energy generation conclusively prove the new DEFR technologies are needed.

Using NYISO data, I was able to estimate solar and wind energy production and how much they generated relative to the potential amount they could generate. I found that the snowstorm starting on January 23, followed by below-freezing temperatures, buried most solar panels through February 4 that reduced solar output to negligible levels.

The results are unequivocal. Using the oil-fired generation during the event as a proxy for peaking units, I showed that the amount of fuel burned during this episode could not be replaced by wind, solar, and energy storage. When there is no re-charging available energy storage runs out.

The results provided confirm my prior assertions that wind and solar do not support the system when needed most. Proponents of the Climate Act fail to recognize that electric systems [must be built](#) around reliability during peak demand and that this winter's weather shows how risky dependence on wind and solar will be without DEFR.

Coming Attraction

I have long been meaning to address the myth that renewables provide the cheapest electricity. Before I prepare an article, I research the topic. Because this myth has achieved "everybody knows that" status any rebuttal must have strong supporting arguments. At Watts Up With That I [described](#) a series of technical articles at the [Science of Doom](#) blog by Steve Carson that explains why this myth is not true. He sums it up: "We built a lot of cheap intermittent energy, and now the expensive part is making the system work when that energy isn't there." I plan to prepare a couple of articles for this blog based on his analysis in the meantime this illustration courtesy of Watts Up With That sums it up for my fellow travelers on the NYS Titanic.

