

Greening the Capitol

Let's be honest: The year 2040 is basically tomorrow. That's when, per the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, all electricity generated in New York state must be from renewable sources. A kid born today will still be in high school then.

In this sense, a proposal to power the state Capitol complex on renewables is not only reasonable, it should be expected — and it's the right move in more ways than one.

The Renewable Capitol Act, launched in the Legislature for the second year in a row by state Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy of Albany, would mandate that the Empire State Plaza and other downtown state buildings be heated, cooled and lit entirely by renewable energy.

Decarbonizing the Capitol complex would be a symbol of respect for Albany, an investment in the city and particularly in the neighborhoods whose residents have borne the brunt of Capitol pollution for decades. Over the years the state has burned coal,

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gas and even trash to power its offices. The latter was particularly egregious: For 12 years in the 1980s and early '90s, the garbage incinerated at the Albany New York Solid Waste Energy Recovery System (ANSWERS) plant fouled Sheridan Hollow's soil and air with toxins that included lead, mercury and other carcinogens, according to state testing.

With that in mind, here's a suggestion: Expand the Renewable Capitol Act to provide clean power to the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood. If any neighborhood in Albany has a right to be the first to go entirely green, it's Sheridan Hollow.

In 2015, the New York Power Authority came forward with a plan to burn natural gas extracted through hydrofracking there — despite the state's fracking ban. Community protests scuttled that plan, and though the Sheridan Hollow plant is burning natural gas now, the state also pledged to build a solar array in Oneida County to provide 50 percent of the Plaza's energy. If that project's still on track, it means that with its launch we'll

already be halfway to 100 percent renewable.

When the state looked into renewable-power options in 2017, after the fracked-gas plan was shot down, the Power Authority said that neither geothermal nor solar could meet the full need, and that it wasn't sure the electric grid could handle the load.

And that's the other reason New York should fully commit to decarbonization now: to figure out how to make it work. Yes, technology has improved since 2017, but the obstacles are still considerable — and if the state can't run its own buildings on renewable energy, then how can the rest of us be expected to make the switch?

We don't mean that as a "gotcha" — the aim here is not to prove green-energy advocates wrong. It's to emphasize that we've *got* to get there despite the obstacles, and that it's incumbent on the state to chart the course. Greening our power grid will take massive investment — we've always known that. And if New York is asking everyone else to figure it out, the state has to figure it out, too.

So yes, it's time for the state to walk the walk — and if it can't, to identify what needs to change so it can.