



NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE
NIAGARA COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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January 18, 2023

Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor, New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

The aftermath of the December blizzard in Western New York has been a time for elected officials, government agencies and the overall public to have an honest discussion about what we learned, what we did well in storm response and what needs improvement. It also provides an opportunity to raise issues about certain long-term policy decisions and how they might impact residents in similar future storms.

With that mind, we write today with very serious concerns regarding New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) Scoping Plan. The fact is, the Scoping Plan makes policy recommendations that seem to completely ignore the realities of a winter storm event like we just faced. Allow us to raise the following questions as they relate to the CLCPA and the storm:

The Electricity Grid

- How would blizzard preparation, response and recovery look if CLCPA Scoping Plan “all electric” was implemented? Does NY have the resources to build out the current electrical supply grid to meet the goals of the CLCPA, specifically as demand is expected to peak during winter months?
- How can we count on electric grid reliability, especially with what will be significantly increased demand, given what we just experienced and the fact the grid improvements that are proposed are not yet online, probably will not be completed on the CLCPA timetable and will surely be untested in the type of situation we just experienced?
- What assurances can the state provide to residents that are hesitant to accept the transition to all electric, specifically during major storm event, considering the vast majority of electric service delivery is above ground, or relies on above ground feed?
- While we have already seen how the blizzard impacted delivery of electricity, have you considered how strong winds, snow accumulation/damage, etc. would affect the supply of electricity?
- How many more residents would have been at risk of freezing in homes or risk of home damage due to lack of heat?
- Have you considered the grid needs to shift from peak summer conditions to peak winter conditions? Instances of extreme cold would cause demand to spike. Additionally, demand will increase for automobile and ancillary equipment charging.
- Considering the strong winds exposed the fragility of our above ground electrical supply and the lack of visibility made it near impossible for crews to quickly mobilize to restore power, should we not be concerned about the reliability of power supply during catastrophic storms?

Storm Response

- How will zero emission medium and heavy duty vehicles perform when tasked with removing a significant amount of snow, clearing vehicles from roadways, and battling conditions to get equipment and manpower where it needs to be to restore power?
- How are the above tasks hampered when outages and lack of back up energy sources mean essential and emergency vehicles cannot be powered?
- Are we to expect that snow removal efforts with a fleet of non-diesel equipment would be as expeditious and efficient as the diesel heavy equipment we currently have? How about the manner in which snow removal is currently conducted to ensure major transportation arteries are clear for first responders and essential employees?
- How many more stranded drivers would we anticipate with all-electric vehicles and would they be at increased risk of freezing to death when their electric charge is exhausted? Considering hundreds of cars needed to be towed to makeshift lots, what would a plan be for charging these vehicles once they were claimed by owners?

Residents

- As a native of WNY, do you believe that electric snow throwers can actually perform at the level of gas powered equipment and maintain their charge long enough for people to safely clear their driveways and sidewalks? In many instances, people were outside for hours working to dig their homes out, well beyond the capacity of electrically-charged equipment. As you know, many deaths in these types of storms are related to cardiac events from people who were manually shoveling heavy snow. Are you concerned that zero-emission snowblowers will lead to more shoveling and hence more cardiac events?
- Considering the travel bans and overall terrible storm conditions, many people were unable to leave their homes for days. The CLCPA calls for adoption of all electric building codes would transition homes from natural gas based hot water, heat and cooking to electric. In this storm, gas fireplaces allowed people to continue to heat their homes even if the power was out. If we lost natural gas even as a backup when electricity goes out, would we not be faced with people freezing in their homes, pipes freezing leading to costly repairs and many other issues?
- An electrical power outage would mean the inability to charge vehicles to evacuate, inability to charge equipment to provide access, inability to cook or use appliances (how would this work in a boil water advisory?). Will residents have to make a decision to prioritize heating their homes, charging batteries for necessary equipment and charging their vehicles?
- Do you have any documentation that shows a heat pump system to be effective in a prolonged event of extreme cold?

As we have stated many times, we are not opposed to policy efforts that look to introduce more environmentally-friendly technology into our lives. And as that technology improves and grows to a level that it is reliable, certainly phasing out fossil fuels is plausible. But it seems the CLCPA Scoping Plan is being fast-tracked beyond the capacity of the grid right now and glosses over the realities many residents in a climate like ours face, especially in a severe winter storm. We implore you to give the issues we have raised your strongest consideration and adjust the CLCPA Scoping plan into something that is far more realistic.

Sincerely,



Irene Myers
Niagara County Legislator



Shawn Foti
Niagara County Legislator