

# PA Senate & House Cttes Pass Resolution Against RGGI Carbon Tax

September 17, 2021 [Electrical Generation](#), [Industrywide Issues](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [Regulation](#), [Statewide PA](#), [Taxation](#)

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On Tuesday the Pennsylvania Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee voted to approve a resolution against Gov. Tom Wolf's cockamamie plan to force the state to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)—nothing more than an obscene carbon tax. A similar resolution passed the PA House Environmental Resources & Energy Committee on Sept. 2. So what happens next? Will PA actually be forced to join RGGI, severely wounding the Marcellus industry?

RGGI is a tax on carbon that will be paid by coal and natural gas-fired electric plants in the state, but no tax will be assessed on solar, wind, nuclear, and other favored forms of electric energy. It's the definition of unfair. Crony capitalism.

Gov. Wolf is attempting to force the state to join RGGI through a back door, without approval by the state legislature. Every single other state that has joined RGGI has done so with a vote of that state's legislature. Wolf fancies himself a tinhorn dictator—challenging anyone and everyone to stop him from doing this illegal action.

What happens next is that the full Senate and the full House will both vote to approve the resolution that would stop the state from joining RGGI. The combined resolution will go to Wolf who will, without a doubt, veto it. The next action will be a re-vote on the resolution to see if Republicans can find enough brave, independent thinkers in the Democrat Party (don't hold your breath) to override Wolf's veto.

If the override vote fails, about the only option left is for the legislature to file a federal lawsuit. The backup plan is to elect a Republican next year

that will promptly withdraw the state from RGGI, as most of the Republican candidates have promised to do.

It would be best to block the RGGI carbon tax from ever taking effect in PA. The consequences on the Marcellus industry, which sells a LOT of gas to electric power plants in PA, would be catastrophic. Which is what Wolf intends.

The 3-2 decision of the Independent Regulatory Review Commission to uphold the state Environmental Quality Board's proposal for Pennsylvania's inclusion in the Northeast Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and its carbon dioxide budget trading program received a party-line rebuke Tuesday from the state Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee.

"I for one am more than willing and happy to stand as a fighter for working families. That's what this is about. This is about working families," said committee Vice Chair Joe Pittman, R-Indiana. "Some may ridicule this as a waste of time and a waste of resources, but as far as I am concerned, fighting for family-sustaining wages is why we are here."

A similar resolution passed the state House Environmental Resources & Energy Committee on Sept. 2, though there some Democrats joined in a 17-3 vote to disapprove and reject Gov. Tom Wolf's decision to enter Pennsylvania into RGGI without legislative approval.

House Committee Chairman Daryl Metcalfe, R-Butler, said those in favor of RGGI are "ignoring the devastation it will cause consumers, energy workers and the energy industry as a whole."

The leading Democrat on the Senate committee reiterated her previous opposition.

"We've been down this road before and yet RGGI continues to move forward," said committee Minority Chair Carolyn Comitta, D-Chester. "The administration has the authority to enter RGGI under the Air Pollution

Control Act. And, we have a Constitutional directive to 'conserve and maintain the people's right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and aesthetic values of the environment.'"

On Facebook after the committee vote, Comitta again said that "more and more scientific studies show the negative impacts of carbon emissions on our environment, public health, and environmental justice communities," and that "more and more opportunities are emerging in the clean energy economy for new and transitioning workers."

For his part, Pittman chided the Democratic members of the Senate committee for turning a deaf ear to calls from organized labor against RGGI and for deriding efforts to derail the governor's bid, which would be the only one where a state legislature did not join its executive branch in endorsing RGGI.

"For me this is an easy issue because it is about jobs. It's about family-sustaining wages. And yes, it's somewhat parochial in terms of the district I represent," Pittman said. "But all of us in the legislature, regardless of party affiliation and policy, should be very concerned about what we are preparing to do in allowing our executive branch to unilaterally engage in such policy initiatives."

Pittman also predicted that the matter will go to court, as IRRC Chairman George Bedwick predicted Sept. 1 when the commission voted 3-2 along party lines for RGGI, and said a reversal of the state's move into RGGI could follow the end of Wolf's term in office, "in 16 months."

A spokesman for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, which includes the Environmental Quality Board, did not address the Senate committee vote in his comments.

"We respect the regulatory process and the Environmental Quality Board and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission have approved Pennsylvania joining RGGI, making our residents safer and healthier as it

combats climate change,” Jamar Thrasher said Tuesday afternoon. “Further, we have had an outpouring of community support, evidenced by the thousands of comments received on this issue. More than 14,000 people submitted comments during the public comment period of the regulatory process, one of the highest number of commenters in DEP history, and over 95 percent of comments received supported addressing climate pollution through RGGI participation.”

Thrasher said that confirmed a Yale/George Mason University poll, which found that 72 percent percent of Pennsylvania voters support participation.

“So, let’s get off this merry-go-round and get to work on finding measures we can agree on,” Comitta posted on Facebook, “for our environmental future, for our energy future, and for the future of the people of Pennsylvania.”

Pittman said what he termed the carbon tax rate was \$5.20 per ton of carbon dioxide when Wolf issued his executive order in 2019 starting Pennsylvania on the path to RGGI.

“Since then,” Pittman said, “the RGGI tax rate has increased 79 percent to \$9.30. Models produced for the state Department of Environmental Protection emphasized that the RGGI tax rate would not surpass \$7 per CO2 ton until at least 2025.”

Thrasher insisted, as others in the administration have said before, that “this is not a carbon tax.”

He also reiterated the administration’s statements about the future of coal-fired power plants, and how RGGI could benefit communities affected by the closing of plants in such areas as Indiana and neighboring counties.

“Over the past decade, more than a dozen coal fired power plants have closed in Pennsylvania, due to the shifting economics of energy, and a rapid movement to less expensive natural gas generation,” the DEP

spokesman said. "Participating in RGGI could offer hundreds of millions of dollars over the next decade to help displaced workers and their communities."

The resolutions passed in Senate and House committees now go to their respective chambers. The House is to reconvene today and has 22 session days left this year. The Senate is to reconvene Monday and has 18 session days left this year.\*