

Opinion

Letter: State is on the right track in pursuing clean energy

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State is on the right track in pursuing clean energy

A recent letter asserted that closing the coal-fired Huntley and Dunkirk electric plants would not reduce carbon emissions, because coal-based electricity would be replaced by the same from other states. But according to the New York Independent System Operator (NYISO), which oversees New York's part of the Eastern grid, coal-fired plants are not needed, even for occasional peak demand for electricity. Low-cost transmission upgrades are enough to fill the gap.

Huntley and Dunkirk are among the leading emitters of carbon, sulfur dioxide and mercury pollution in New York. Nationally, emissions from coal-fired electricity are responsible for more than 30,000 premature deaths every year, thousands of lost work and school days, and enormous medical costs and suffering due to asthma and other respiratory diseases.

Repowering coal-fired plants with gas is not a sound option, either. When the environmental costs of hydrofracking, transmission and leakage are added to those of carbon emissions, gas is not much of an improvement over coal, either for health or for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Without immediate action, even partial mitigation of projected climate change would cost trillions of dollars in New York alone.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has listened to scientific evidence by directing the shutdown of the four remaining coal-fired power plants in the state, while providing transition funds for the workers and municipalities that have depended on coal plant jobs and tax payments. There is no time to waste in getting to his announced goal of 50 percent or more renewable electricity by 2030.

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