A Major Player in Meeting NY’s Climate Goals: Building Electrification

By Diana Strablow

As evidence of the unfolding climate crisis mounts, so does frustration over the lack of comprehensive action by our federal government. Foot dragging and roadblocks in Washington, DC make NY State actions even more significant appearing as a bright beacon taking the lead on real climate action.

In 2019, NY passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), establishing serious mandates of 70 percent renewable energy by 2030, 40 percent GHG emissions reductions by 2030 and 85 percent reductions by 2050.

Since then, planning has been underway and we are ready to move forward implementation of accomplishing this mandates. One place to look will have a major impact is our homes and buildings.

In 2020, our years long fracking moratorium was made into law. Yet, most of our homes are still heated with fracked gas brought in from other states. This gas is composed of methane which is 86 times more potent as a heat trapping gas than CO2. The fossil fuels used in our homes and buildings for heating and cooling our homes and buildings. Zero emission homes and buildings are those that use energy efficient appliances such as induction stoves and clothes dryers. Not only will this drastically reduce GHG emissions, but it will make the air we breathe in our homes, schools and workplaces healthier.

This transition to energy efficient electric based homes must be done in an equitable way that is affordable for all. With this in mind, RHN has done extensive study and collaboration to put together a package of proposals and legislation to advocate for in the current 2022 legislative session. We were thrilled to hear Gov. Kathy Hochul in her recent State of the State Address, adopt our call for 2 million all electric homes by 2030 with dedicated funding for low-income families. Our new governor is also planning for training programs necessary to ensure that New York has a skilled workforce to deliver these services.

Now we turn to our NY State Legislature for passage of the RHNN package which contains proposals designed, like pieces of a puzzle fitting together, to accomplish our goal of meeting NY’s homes and buildings. The easiest place to start is with new buildings and buildings that help us mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, some opposing and well-financed forces will be lobbying and advertising hard to keep us tied to fracked gas. Let’s make it clear we’re ready to kick the fracked gas habit! We need to work together to remove non-renewable heat now.

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Time to Update the Bottle Bill for the 21st Century

By John Scalansky

The Governor’s Executive Budget proposal comes out every January, and the former Governor made it a multi-day event to discuss its details. Well beyond dollars and cents, the budget proposal includes many non-financial legislative proposals that would be difficult to pass as stand-alone bills. Examples of these additions to the Governor’s Executive Budget included the Bag Waste Reduction Law (which gave us our plastic bag ban two years ago) and the Expanded Polystyrene Foam Food Container and Polystyrene Loose Fill Packaging Ban (which went into effect on January 1st). Both were included to assist local community waste and recycling programs as these items are not curbside recyclable. Removing these items also helps to reduce litter and protect waterways and wildlife from plastic pollution.

Imagine how much more litter there would be without the New York State Returnable Container Act (the “Bottle Bill”). Since its inception in 1982, studies by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation have shown that the Bottle Bill has reduced roadside litter by 70% and helped to recycle 5.5 billion plastic, glass and aluminum containers at no cost to local governments. But, except for the addition of water bottles in 2009, the Bottle Bill has not changed with the times and it is time for an upgrade.

Such an upgrade was done in 2017 in Oregon. The deposits on containers were raised from 5¢ to 10¢ and the redemption rate went from 69.9% for metal and 54.6% for plastic in 2016 to 89.6% for metal and 83.5% for plastic in 2019. The bill also expanded the types of beverages included for deposits. Connecticut mirrored many of these changes in a bill they passed earlier this year and will go into effect starting in 2023.

A coalition of groups, led by the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), has called on Governor Kathy Hochul to include a “Bigger, Better Bottle Bill” as part of her 2022-23 Executive Budget. The NYPIRG proposal would add deposits to more beverage types including non-carbonated drinks like sports drinks and teas. It would also include deposits on wine, hard cider and spirits. The deposit would increase to 10¢ as it has been shown that higher deposits equate to higher returns.

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For those who want to see recycling work in New York, expansion of the Bottle Bill will increase the amount of aluminum, plastic and glass that is recycled into a circular economy. The collected materials are ideal for being turned into new product as the materials are sorted as they are collected, creating a clean product stream that cannot be matched by curbside recycling programs. Additionally, including wines and spirits to the Bottle Bill will remove their glass bottles, which tend to break and contaminate the items in a single stream recycling program. The Sierra Club has long supported Bottle Bills and is a supporter of the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act, which includes a National Bottle Bill. Our Atlantic Chapter is part of the coalition that signed on to the request to have the “Bigger Better Bottle Bill” included in the state budget. As Roger Downs, the Atlantic Chapter’s Conservation Director points out about the Bottle Bill, “It’s time for the legislature and Governor Hochul to make this landmark recycling law effective again – by funding more zero waste programs and comprehensive covering all beverage containers with right-sized redemption fees.”

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Please remember that these meetings are open to our entire membership in order to provide current information on environmental issues with relevant expert speakers. We hope that more information will empower our membership, increasing your activism by writing editorial newspaper articles or letters to our regional politicians, or using this information to inform your votes. If you wish to participate in these Zoom meetings, please supply your email to the Sierra Club (NiagaraSierra@gmail.com) and we will be sure to send you an announcement of each meeting. We appreciate your support!