

Gov. Newsom promised courage in scrapping fossil fuels. Will he keep his pledge?

Calling it “the beginning of the end of natural gas” in Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti last month announced that he was scrapping plans to rebuild three aging gas power plants on the Southern California coast. He vowed to shut down the gas units and set his city – the second largest in the country – on a path to 100 percent renewable energy.

Garcetti’s decisive action makes him a leader in the fight against climate change, not just in California, but across the country. It takes political courage to refrain from spending taxpayer dollars on outdated fossil fuel technology, especially given the colossal power of Big Oil and Gas money in California politics.

His bold action provides a road map for how Gov. Gavin Newsom should address climate change over the next four years. As a candidate, Newsom pledged to “on day one ... issue a directive putting California on a clear path to 100 percent renewable energy.”

Yet, 76 days after taking office, Newsom has yet to act. If he seeks to truly meet the challenge and scope of the climate crisis, he must keep his pledge. With the stroke of his executive pen, Gov. Newsom can take strong steps to protect Californians from the worsening local effects of global climate chaos, which include fires, floods, drought and air so toxic kids can’t even play outside on some days.

First, Gov. Newsom can make good on his pledge to shut down the Southern California Gas Company’s Aliso Canyon storage facility, which is the site of the worst gas blowout in U.S. history.

“If California can accomplish that monumental lift [to retire California’s last nuclear power plant] within eight-years, I think we can be more ambitious at Aliso Canyon and I will press for quicker resolution because I know we can do much better for the community while protecting ratepayers, the environment, and union jobs,” Newsom said during his gubernatorial campaign.

More than three years after the Aliso blowout, San Fernando Valley neighbors are still sick with rashes, weakness, nausea, headaches and other symptoms attributed to ongoing leaks at the gas field.

Now that Mayor Garcetti has vowed to replace L.A. gas plants with renewable energy and agrees that Aliso Canyon must be shut down, there is no excuse to continue to store gas at the facility. Gov. Newsom should order regulators to shut it down immediately.

On the campaign trail, Gov. Newsom also expressed opposition to “fracking and other unsafe oil operations.” Fracking, along with other forms of extreme extraction, like cyclic steam injection or acidizing, sends a high-pressure, toxic chemical soup underground, putting California’s precious aquifers at risk. Families living near this dangerous drilling have been sounding the alarm for years because they are concerned that their water is being contaminated by carcinogens like benzene.

These frontline families urgently need courageous action from the governor. He can start by taking sensible action to protect families from the health dangers of conventional drilling. This means instituting a 2,500-foot buffer zone between oil drilling operations and sensitive areas like homes and schools. Such action would be life-changing for thousands of Angelenos who live just a few hundred feet – or less – from active oil wells.

Alexandra Nagy

Statewide, there are nearly 8,500 active oil wells within 2,500 feet of sensitive sites like homes, schools and hospitals. A safety buffer zone is a good first step the governor can take on the way to banning harmful practices like fracking and phasing out all drilling.

Finally, Gov. Newsom can show true climate leadership by keeping his promise and announcing a plan to move California off fossil fuels. If he set his sights on 2030 as a deadline, he would be in line with scientific consensus and national calls for a Green New Deal.

Gov. Newsom's plan should ensure that renewable energy is truly clean, which means solar, wind, geothermal and existing hydroelectric. His plan must not include dangerous nuclear power or dirty energy sources like biogas and biomass. It must also include a fair and just transition for workers and affected communities. This includes the development of renewable energy in low-income communities, as well as programs to transition the state's existing fossil fuel workforce and members of underserved communities to good green jobs.

Gov. Newsom has all the authority he needs to take these urgent steps now. If L.A. can move off fossil fuels onto renewable energy, all of California can follow. The future of our state – and our world – demands big vision and bigger courage.

Alexandra Nagy is a Los Angeles-based Senior Organizer at Food & Water Watch

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Feds boast that nuclear energy is the 'real new green deal'

Vogtle nuclear power plant, Waynesboro, Georgia.

Georgia Power

At a speech to nuclear power plant employees in Georgia, where the two new reactors are being built, Perry highlighted the administration's broader goals of "making America great again," opening his address by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, look around you. This is the real new green deal."

The financial boost for the pair of reactors being built at the Vogtle power station near Augusta, Georgia is but a drop in the bucket, considering the cost overruns already incurred by the owners. The project was originally approved in 2012, with a price tag of \$14 billion.

Today, with overruns, the price is double that amount and growing. The new guaranteed \$3.7 billion in financing comes on top of another \$8.3 billion in loan guarantees from the Energy Department under Barack Obama. Completion is now set for sometime in 2022.

Nuclear becomes part of clean energy Congressional members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ed Markey introduced their "Green New Deal" in February that calls for a rapid shift to carbon-free energy. The plan calls for drastic measures to reduce carbon emissions across the economy, from transportation and agriculture to building efficiency upgrades and energy generation.

"We've drafted it in a way which can get the support of

progressives and moderates inside of our caucus,” Sen. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), one of the lead sponsors of the Green New Deal resolution, told reporters last month.

But, Forbes notes that at first, nuclear power plants were left out of the plan. The deal actually called for phasing out all nuclear power plants and included a fact sheet that also killed any ideas of building new ones.

Schumer working to keep Dems aligned ahead of forced vote on Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal <https://t.co/DzGDDNjRt2pic.twitter.com/5ncZBTYMai>

– The Hill (@thehill) March 25, 2019

The plan immediately ran into a roadblock because nuclear, a clean form of energy, was left out. So, a section of the new green deal was rewritten that while making no mention of nuclear power, does include it as a source of clean energy. This is why Perry made a reference to the new green deal on Friday.

Now, the text of the plan includes the goal of “meeting 100 percent of the power demand in the United States through clean, renewable, and zero-emission energy sources, including– (i) by dramatically expanding and upgrading renewable power sources; and (ii) by deploying new capacity.”

If the new green deal continues to gain traction, we will have to have serious discussions on how we go about meeting the goals set forth in the plan while insuring that our electricity generation needs are met. Clean energy – carbon emissions-free – does not include fossil fuels or natural gas. The proposed “new Green Deal” will be voted on today.

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Parties battle it out on small business energy blueprint

Pic: Greenhouse gases

The Victorian government has announced its own default price, while the federal government's policy would cover South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales.

Speaking to The Age and Sydney Morning Herald at the event, the minister also said he was "determined" to see the government's 'big stick' energy policies, including its forced divestiture policy, into the election campaign.

The policy includes a range of measures including powers to request a court order to force an energy company to divest assets if misusing market power.

"It is extraordinary to me that the so called friend of the worker, the Labor party, doesn't want to support this," minister Taylor said.

He also said it was also more important for small business owners, particularly in "weather sensitive" sectors like farming, to track climate data in order to help with business planning.

"My family has been doing this for 20 years – we use the CSIRO modelling of how weather is changing. There is good data out there and if you are a weather-sensitive business, you should do that work."

The energy summit heard research commissioned by COSBOA surveying 200 small businesses across Australia which found one in ten are unable to repay electricity bills, while businesses that rent their premises are finding it harder to cope with power price increases than those owning property.

Shadow minister for climate change Pat Conroy said energy policy stability is the major issue for small businesses.

“The government has had 12 energy policies in two and a half years, and we’ve signalled our main focus is restoring stability,” he said.

Labor outlined its plan to reach a bipartisan national energy guarantee in its quest to deliver 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030.

The Australian Greens also laid out a blueprint for levelling the playing field for small businesses, including the introduction of low-cost electricity packages for businesses through a not-for-profit, publicly owned electricity retailer.

Greens energy spokesperson Adam Bandt proposed a \$200 million small business “clean energy” fund to provide smaller operators with \$10,000 grants for projects that improve energy efficiency.

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The nation must adopt new energy paradigms

Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport recently experienced yet another sudden power outage resulting in delays for many

travelers. It was the fourth outage in a year, but it was not related to Taiwan Power Co's (Taipower) systems. It was caused by equipment that is not managed by Taipower.

Airports in many developed countries have their own cogeneration systems to guarantee a stable multisource power supply to protect the public's rights and interests. For example, international airports in San Francisco and Los Angeles have cogeneration systems of different sizes.

In this situation, the power company is in effect a backup supplier of energy to the terminals, offering a second guarantee. In addition, emergency diesel-powered generators – which also exist at Taoyuan airport – provide a third guarantee, although they cannot be sustained for long periods and should be the last option.

This is the reason why a cogeneration system should be installed even if the power it generates is a bit more expensive.

Cogeneration systems have two other advantages. As they generate both heat and electricity, thermal efficiency can surpass 80 percent, making it one of the most efficient energy-saving solutions. This is also why many countries encourage and stipulate that power companies must purchase surplus energy generated by cogeneration systems as part of their cost avoidance policies. Taiwan is no exception.

The second advantage of a cogeneration system is that following the growing proportion of distributed energy resources, unstable solar and wind energy generation requires greater backup capacity, while cogeneration allows the flexible adjustment of the proportions of thermal and electric energy generation, making it one of the best backup systems.

This is why a developed country like Denmark estimates that cogeneration systems will continue to make up about 30 percent

of total power generation capacity until 2030, while solar and wind generation will make up more than 50 percent and coal-fired generation will provide less than 20 percent.

This means that following Taiwan's energy generation transformation toward green energy, a greater focus should be placed on the development of regional cogeneration systems and the construction of micro-grids that can operate independently and combine cogeneration with renewable energy sources.

It is worth noting that although there are more than 80 cogeneration systems in Taiwan, they all belong to the manufacturing industry and most are coal-fired. This is different from the situation in developed countries, where the main energy source is natural gas and the systems are used in the services and the manufacturing industries.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the liquefied natural gas that the nation imports is used by Taipower and private power plants for traditional power generation, which has a thermal efficiency of about 50 percent. This, unfortunately, is far less than at a cogeneration system.

The government should join the international trend toward green energy and energy savings, and pay more attention to developing a strategy for natural gas-fired cogeneration systems, which should be primarily used at service industry hubs or important buildings.

This would result in a stronger and more resilient energy system, facilitate flexible plans for a larger proportion of renewable energy generation and make stable low-carbon power supply in smart cities and communities a reality, thus guaranteeing the public's right to use electricity.

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Update: Chile-Floating Solar Island story

In a story March 15 about a floating island of solar panels in Chile, The Associated Press reported erroneously that the array is 1,200 square feet. The array is 1,200 square meters.

A corrected version of the story is below:

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) – A floating island of solar panels is being tested in Chile as a way to generate clean energy and reduce water loss at mine operations, a cornerstone of the Andean country’s economy that uses huge amounts of electricity and water.

The experimental “Las Tortolas” power-generating island is being run by the giant Anglo American mining company at its Los Bronces mine, and the initiative comes as the government pushes to put Chile at the forefront of renewable energy use in Latin America and the world.

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The 1,200-square-meter (12,917-square-foot) array of solar panels was inaugurated Thursday by Chilean Mining Minister Baldo Prokurica. Officials said that if the test is successful, the \$250,000 plant could be expanded to cover 40 hectares, or nearly 100 acres.

The array floats in the middle of a pond that is used to

contain the refuse from mining, known as tailings, and it is expected that its shadow will lower the water temperature and reduce evaporation by 80 percent. Thus, the mine would retain more of that water for its operations and could reduce the amount of fresh water it pumps in the dry mountainous region where water is a scarce commodity.

“With this system, we can make our fresh water consumption more efficient, in line with our goal of re-imagining mining and reducing Anglo American’s fresh water consumption by 50 percent by 2030, as well as the CO2 emissions by producing non-polluting energy,” said Patricio Chacana, Los Bronces’ vice president of operations.

If the yearlong experiment works as planned, the solar panel island could be expanded and new ones could be installed at other mining ponds. Experts say there are approximately 800 such ponds in Chile.

“It is an excellent idea for the traceability of the mining industry and especially in terms of more efficient use of water. This is a company that recycles 76 percent of the water it uses in its processes,” the mining minister said at the unveiling and he encouraged other mining companies to follow suit.

In addition, Prokurica said the Mining Ministry is working on a plan to improve the safety of the mine holding ponds, to guard against failures such as one at an iron ore mine recently in Brazil that unleashed a wall of mud that killed at least 186 people and polluted hundreds of miles of river. Many of the tailing ponds in the north of the country are near urban centers.

Los Bronces is about 3,500 meters (11,500 feet) above sea level and is 65 kilometers (40 miles) from the country’s capital, Santiago. In 2018, the mine produced 370,000 tons of fine copper and 2,421 tons of molybdenum.

Almost 20 percent of the energy currently produced and used in Chile comes from renewable sources, up from 6 percent in 2013.

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New energy and climate plan stresses focus on solar power

The plan includes extensions on measures to incentivise large-scale solar farms. Photo: Jonathan Borg

Malta will increase its focus on solar energy under a new 2030 plan though development policies and lack of available land could hamper the shift.

The draft National Energy and Climate Plan, newly published for public consultation, lays out the government's strategy for the next decade under the EU's long-term climate goals and Paris Agreement commitments.

It lays out key objectives for Malta of a 19% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a 13% share of renewable energy in final energy consumption by 2030.

Building on a move towards solar energy generation in the current renewable energy plan, the draft document includes extensions on measures to incentivise large-scale solar farms and rooftop photovoltaic panels. It suggests that solar output could reach a 260 megawatt peak by 2030 – implying a total footprint of about 3.4 square kilometres – compared to a planned 160 megawatts and a 2.7 square-kilometre footprint in 2020.

This would contribute to between 30 and 40% of Malta's renewable energy contribution while heating and cooling – primarily heat pumps – will contribute 40 to 54%.

Waste-to-energy electricity generation from the major incinerator planned to be completed by 2023 is expected to contribute only “a relatively small share”.

Prioritisation of PV systems, however, could, according to the plan, be hampered by the rapid decrease in the land available for solar farm developments, pushing up costs.

Between 30 and 40% of Malta's renewable energy contribution

Moreover, planning policies encouraging the development of apartment blocks pose further problems both because of the reduction of available roof space and also by the increase in overshadowing.

The plan warns that interest in investment in renewable energy appears to be waning, with real estate investment being prioritised due to its shorter payback period and perceived longer-term benefits.

It points to the low take-up on the government's second competitive call for large-scale solar installations, where the total bids amounted to just half of the capacity on offer.

The plan proposes discussions with banks to include incentives for the installation of PVs and solar water heaters in loan policies, as well as incentive schemes for developers and real estate agents.

It also proposes building on the government's communal photovoltaic farm project at the site Il-Fiddien, allowing people without access to a private roof to buy into the shift.

Also stressed is the importance of solar water heaters, with the government aiming to provide support for the installation of 1,500 systems every year in the next decade – compared to

400 a year under previous plans – although it notes that the past few years have seen a downward trend in such systems as preferences move to PV panels.

The draft plan does not include any assessment of the impact the planned policies and measures are projected to have, stating only that this analysis will be included in the final plan that must be submitted to the European Commission by the end of the year.

The plan, which is open to public consultation until April 10, also includes the government's 2030 measures on energy security, internal energy market, energy efficiency and research, innovation and competitiveness.

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