

Environment & Energy

Climate Bills Left Undone in State Legislatures Frustrate Greens

By Zach Bright

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- Rhode Island governor signs emissions plan
 - Delaware, Arizona lawmakers make less climate headway
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Notable wind energy and water project bills were among legislation adopted as six state legislatures wrapped up their June sessions, but environmentalists say a host of other issues were left on the table in some states.

Rhode Island adopted faster emissions reduction targets and passed renewable energy projects to reach them. But in Delaware, an environmental rights proposal and stronger decarbonization goals failed. Arizona, which advanced more than \$1 billion package to address its water supply amid scorching drought, passed little to address climate change itself.

Rhode Island will set a target of 100% renewable electricity by 2033 after Gov. Dan McKee (D) signed S2274 / H7277 a day before the state's legislative session ended on Thursday. To reach that goal—first laid out through executive order by former Gov. Gina Raimondo (D)—the Legislature passed bills encouraging wind farms and union jobs to build them.

But big environmental initiatives in Democratic-led Delaware, save for measures like a plastic bag ban in effect starting this Friday, largely didn't break through.

'We Are So Far Behind'

SB 305, a Climate Change Solutions Act, would have set legally required standards for Delaware to reduce carbon emissions by 50% before 2030 and by 90% by 2050. The measure was passed by the Senate in a 13-6 vote, but was pulled from consideration in the House Natural Resources Committee.

"We are so far behind our neighboring states and what the climate science is telling us we need to do to avoid the worst impacts of climate change here in Delaware," said Dustyn Thompson, advocacy and outreach organizer for the Sierra Club Delaware Chapter.

The Sierra Club has received funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the charitable organization founded by Michael Bloomberg. Bloomberg Law is operated by entities controlled by Michael Bloomberg.

Bill opponents, including the conservative Caesar Rodney Institute, said it would raise costs on energy consumers and give the state's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control too much authority without legislative oversight.

Another piece of legislation, HB 220, would guarantee rights to clean air, water, and soil for state residents and empower them to sue state agencies for violations. House Speaker Peter Schwartkopf (D) opposed the bill and said in a hearing that the state would assume liabilities ultimately caused by private companies. The Delaware House Administration Committee tabled the bill in June.

Water, Drought

On Arizona lawmakers' last day in session this week, more than \$1 billion toward water in SB 1740 was passed. The bill would empower the state's Water Infrastructure Finance Authority to grant money toward projects that improve the water supply.

That could include creating facilities to filter, treat, and reuse wastewater or desalinate seawater. The legislation's passage comes after the first-ever mandated cutback of Colorado River water through the Central Arizona Project.

The funding is encouraging, said Kevin Moran, associate vice president of regional affairs for the Environmental Defense Fund. But he added that "the legislation fell far short of what's needed to meet the daunting challenges we face in Arizona of megadrought supercharged by climate change."

Gov. Doug Ducey (R) called it an "unprecedented investment" in a statement and indicated he will sign the bill.

The Republican-led legislature passed few bills to directly address climate change, to which extreme drought conditions are linked.

Ducey signed a bipartisan bill, SB 1376, sponsored by Republican state Sen. Rick Gray to promote climate-friendlier refrigerants. But Democratic state Sen. Victoria Steele's framework on how to spend \$76 million in federal infrastructure dollars for electric vehicle charging stations didn't advance.

Fewer than 10 states remain in their legislative sessions.

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