

Environment & Energy

# Virginia Governor's Energy Plan Rejects Gas-Powered Car Phaseout

By Zach Bright

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- Governor recommends repeal gas-powered auto phaseout
  - Would be break from Virginia's previous energy policy
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A Virginia energy plan aiming to repeal a gas-powered vehicle phaseout, expedite permitting processes, and make the state home to the country's first small modular nuclear reactor was released Monday by Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R).

The governor said his approach embraces "an all-of-the-above energy plan that includes natural gas, nuclear, renewables and the exploration of emerging sources to satisfy the growing needs of Commonwealth residents and businesses."

The changes he proposed include severing the state from California's clean car standards for greenhouse gases, which Virginia and at least 15 other states are poised to follow. The rules will require that 100% of vehicles sold be zero- or low-emission.

If passed, Youngkin's policies would be a break from energy policy led by the state's previously Democratic-controlled government. But changes would have to come through the Virginia Legislature, where control is split between Democrats in the Senate and Republicans in the House.

Youngkin also wants to build the first commercial small modular nuclear reactor in the US within a decade. The plan also calls for developing spent nuclear fuel recycling technologies to achieve a closed-loop supply chain.

With just his executive authority, Youngkin also aims to expedite permitting processes of fossil fuel infrastructure like pipeline development.

## Clean Energy 'Retreat'

Youngkin wants to require the Virginia Clean Economy Act, which was passed in 2020, to be reauthorized every five years, starting in 2023.

Environmental groups in the state say such a move could allow lawmakers to weaken the law. The state's energy law codified its goal of 100% clean energy by 2050 and set a renewable portfolio standard for investor-owned utilities.

The governor said the act "introduced uncertainty into the Commonwealth's energy landscape, placing additional costs on consumers and raising concerns regarding the reliability of the electrical grid, a historically strong aspect of Virginia's energy system."

Youngkin also attacked the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a multistate effort to cap and reduce carbon dioxide emissions from the power sector. He said Virginia's membership in RGGI burdened Virginians with higher costs and hasn't helped decrease emissions, but stopped short of outlining how the state would withdraw from the framework.

Youngkin's plan also would restore authority to the Virginia State Corporation Commission, which governs utilities, to oversee power plant retirement timelines.

"Years of bad legislation have handcuffed the State Corporation Commission's ability to prevent these ratepayer abuses," said Will Cleveland, a senior attorney in Southern Environmental Law Center's Charlottesville, Va., office. "We would happily work with the Governor to rectify the fundamental ratemaking problems, but we cannot retreat from our clean energy transition."

To contact the reporter on this story: Zach Bright at [zbright@bloombergindustry.com](mailto:zbright@bloombergindustry.com)

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Renee Schoof at [rschoof@bloombergindustry.com](mailto:rschoof@bloombergindustry.com)

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