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California needs to accelerate efforts to achieve clean energy goals



BY GUEST COMMENTARY

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IN SUMMARY

California will need to more than double renewable energy capacity in the next 10 years, and state leaders have to plan for that expansion.



By Phil Angelides, Special to CalMatters

Phil Angelides, former California State Treasurer, is president of Riverview Capital Investments, which focuses on sustainable urban development and clean energy, pa@angelides.com. He was chairman of the U.S. Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission from 2009-2011.

As our state has suffered through a summer of record-breaking heat waves, blackouts and wildfires, Gov. Gavin Newsom has rightly pegged what's principally behind these challenges: "If you are in denial about climate change," he said recently, "come to California."

In the wake of wildfires that have burned an area roughly the size of Connecticut, the governor pledged to accelerate progress toward the [state's goal](#) of 100% clean energy by 2045.

Turning this pledge into reality will require a full-force effort. The first step may be the hardest: It will require state leaders to accept that California, for all the progress we've made on climate issues, has not yet done what needs to be done to prepare for the next, all-important phase of renewable energy expansion over the next 10 years.

This year's fires and power outages are a wake-up call – and it's beyond time we heard it. California has rightly earned a reputation as a world leader on climate issues over the last two decades, with more than a third of our state's electricity now generated by renewable energy. But to hit our next set of targets – including 60% renewable energy by 2030 – California is going to need to more than double our current renewable energy capacity in the next 10 years. To hit our 25-year targets, we will need to build roughly 3 gigawatts of solar, wind, geothermal and storage every

year between now and 2045.

Right now, we are nowhere close to achieving these goals.

Construction of new renewable energy projects in California peaked in 2013-14, the result of a concerted federal and state economic recovery effort undertaken in the wake of the Great Recession. Since then, solar power has continued to expand, but the growth of other renewable technologies has essentially flat lined. The consequences are clear: Only two weeks after the August blackouts, the state extended the leases on four aging gas plants scheduled to be retired this year – citing the potential for an electricity capacity shortfall during the evening hours, when the sun goes down and our solar resources go offline.

California's renewable energy system can be designed to solve this challenge – through investments in storage, wind and other power sources available around the clock. But to get there, state leaders must lead a coordinated effort to ensure that many more renewable projects are planned, permitted and built.

We must also accept that some of our key government agencies, including the California Public Utilities Commission, are not moving at the pace or scale required to accomplish this goal. The CPUC has had a decade to procure enough energy to replace some of

our oldest and most environmentally-damaging fossil fuel plants – as well as the Diablo Canyon nuclear units – but it still has not finished the job.

Every one of the agencies responsible for getting more renewable energy online needs to be given a clear directive that the time has come to shift into high gear to meet the state’s climate goals.

There is plenty of renewable energy available to fill the gaps in the state’s energy system. There has been a lot of attention lately, for example, on how much the grid relies on Diablo Canyon (2.28 gigawatts) or Southern California gas-fired plants (5.13 gigawatts). But the fact is, there is more than 15 gigawatts of high-capacity factor wind potential in the West – which can be quickly brought online when needed – and our state is home to almost 4 gigawatts of potential geothermal energy. If we think even bigger, there is another 21 gigawatts of wind energy capacity on the horizon, 25 miles offshore. We’ve already developed a robust demand response system, and now we must build an even more diverse, reliable renewable energy portfolio.

These renewable resources are available, they are cheaper on the whole than fossil fuels, and they are critical to keeping the lights on. It is time for the state to do what it takes to bring them online – and to finish the job of building the renewable energy system we need.

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