

# The Wrong Way to Save Ohio's Zero-Carbon Nuclear Plants

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Since our inception, Third Way has advocated for nuclear power as a key tool for the United States to produce clean energy and address climate change. We helped generate support for federal policies to promote the development of advanced nuclear technologies, and we have backed efforts in states like New York, Illinois, Connecticut, New Jersey and Pennsylvania to prevent the premature closure of safely operating nuclear facilities. This is motivated by the findings of groups like the International Energy Agency, which highlighted on May 28, the global need for saving nuclear power, noting “[w]ithout action to provide more support for nuclear power, global efforts to transition to a cleaner energy system will become drastically harder and more costly.”

Right now, the spotlight on the future of nuclear in the United States is shining on Ohio. There, the utility FirstEnergy Solutions says it will close the two nuclear plants it operates in the state unless Ohio provides financial assistance. These plants produce 90% of Ohio’s zero-carbon electricity. And according to a report from the Brattle Group, their closure would cost the state 4,200 jobs, reduce GDP by

\$510 million, and result in a significant increase in carbon emissions and particulate matter pollution. Put simply, the consequences of losing these plants is significant, and an effort should be made to keep them operating.

The state Senate is considering a plan, already passed by the Ohio state House, to save these two nuclear plants.

Unfortunately, the proposal, HB 6, ties the fate of Ohio's nuclear plants to an effort that would keep dirty coal plants operating, and that senselessly undermines renewable energy and energy efficiency. This is absolutely the wrong way to try to save Ohio's nuclear plants, and is not an effort we can support. Instead of providing Ohioans cleaner, affordable electricity and continued economic growth, the current proposal would bring rising carbon emissions, more air pollution, and increased economic risk for Ohio ratepayers. It would also send a signal to businesses across the country that are increasingly prioritizing climate action and cleaner air and water that Ohio is going in the opposite direction.

This is not a snap decision from us. Third Way has supported a range of state policies to keep nuclear power plants operating, because we believe the best, fastest way to get to net-zero emissions and address climate is to use every low and zero-carbon technology we have. That certainly includes the nuclear plants operating in the U.S. along with efficiency, building a lot more renewables like solar and wind, and developing the next generation of technologies, including advanced nuclear and carbon capture. Using every clean energy resource we have is not only the most cost-effective way to make states' air and water cleaner, it makes states more competitive in an economy where a growing number of companies are requiring carbon-free electricity for their operations.

One-hundred percent clean electricity targets are increasingly becoming the standard way to measure states' commitment to clean energy, and a way for states to compete for new businesses and economic growth. The Ohio bill now

making its way to the state Senate does the opposite. Our grave concerns include that it:

- Creates a specific carve-out for coal plants called a “national security generation resource” to keep unprofitable, dirty, coal plants online that provide no real national security benefit to the country. This is particularly troubling given the central role coal-fired power plants play in driving both air pollution and climate-warming carbon pollution, and will require Ohio ratepayers to pay more for expensive, dirty, coal-fired power plants;
- Defines “clean air resources” and “reduced emission resources” that are eligible to benefit from the new Clean Air Fund in a way that excludes renewable energy like wind, solar, hydro and geothermal;
- Defines “clean air resource” to require the source of power to obtain compensation from the wholesale energy markets run by mid-Atlantic grid operator PJM and overseen by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission — a feature met by the state’s nuclear plants, but not by energy efficiency, most wind or solar facilities, or low-carbon distributed energy resources receiving retail compensation;
- Excludes all new solar facilities from participating in the program, completely excludes wind, and any clean energy project owned by a rural cooperative, private company, or municipality. The legislation only applies the credits to major utilities;
- Pulls the rug out from under Ohio’s existing mandates for renewables and energy efficiency, by eliminating funding sources that support those mandates unless customers provide a written request to “opt-in” to allowing charges on their utility bills. That is likely to decimate these important policies, which is something we cannot support.

The result is a woefully misnamed “Ohio Clean Air Program” that will actually *increase* carbon emissions and other pollution in the long-term, and *increase* costs to consumers. As many other states have shown by supporting nuclear *and* renewables, this does not have to be the case.

A growing number of Republicans recognize the need to take action now to reduce emissions because it makes sense for the climate, for our economy, and for cleaner air and water. We have been proud to support efforts to save nuclear power plants in a variety of states and at the federal level, even when it hasn’t been the popular decision with some of our allies. But our efforts at Third Way to preserve nuclear power have always been predicated on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. We will not support efforts to save nuclear power plants that jeopardize the path to a carbon-free future, as is the case with HB 6. We urge the legislature to drop the current proposal. It should instead develop and pass, and the Governor should sign, legislation that protects existing clean energy sources like nuclear, wind and solar, and encourages additional deployment of *all* carbon-free energy.