

Governor Shapiro,

We are shocked and appalled by the report from Inside Climate News that exposes the way your administration has placed the fate of RGGI into the hands of a secret committee, whose members, agendas, and minutes are not made public, and whose members do not share the interests of the public. While the Shapiro administration should be focusing on defending RGGI in court, it is instead offering the corporations who would be regulated by RGGI an additional chance to kill the program.¹

The excuse du jour is that this committee, comprised in large part of corporate polluters and their lobbyists, is seeking a “pragmatic” middle ground between taking inadequate action on the climate crisis, and taking no action whatsoever. At no point in the process has this compromise been made available for the public to comment on.

We are entitled to clean air and water according to Article 1, Section 27 of the PA Constitution, and we are entitled to open meetings under the Sunshine Act.

Therefore, this secret committee should be immediately disbanded, and the administration should begin preparing RGGI for immediate implementation after it clears its court challenges.

Names of those who participated in the committee must all be released, and agendas and minutes for what they discussed must be released as well.

What little we do know about these proceedings is disturbing. According to Inside Climate News:

“Among those invited to participate were Hilary Mercer, a senior vice president at Shell; Lael Campbell, a vice president at Constellation Energy, which operates power plants...”

“The list also included Zachery Smith, director of government relations at CNX Resources; Sean Lane, an executive vice president at Olympus Power, an independent plant operator.”

“A lobbyist for the Pennsylvania Grade Crude Oil Coalition, which represents conventional oil and gas interests, wrote back with enthusiasm about the possibility of someone from the PGCC joining the group. “They are very encouraged by your invitation!!!!” he wrote.”

Inviting polluting industries to write their own regulations is not “pragmatism”; it is surrender.

¹ Inside Climate News report on secret committee:

https://insideclimatenews.org/news/02082023/pennsylvania-shapiro-rggi-climate-change/?utm_medium=email

“Predatory delay” occurs when the outcome of a delay is the same as the outcome of doing nothing. Justice delayed is justice denied. The outcome of these deliberations has been gridlock, which is what the industry wants. Therefore, this secret committee’s impact amounts to a total accession to industry demands.

A more “pragmatic” approach would seek a compromise in policy outcomes. From this perspective, RGGI already is the compromise. The public has demanded aggressive action on the climate crisis and air pollution in election after election, and this cap-and-invest program is the best solution Pennsylvania’s leaders have come up with. Because it sets no net-zero goal, and affects only the electric sector, it is an incomplete solution. But it’s all we have, and now it is at risk of being killed behind closed doors.

Although RGGI would not solve the climate crisis alone, in the states in which it has been implemented, there have been measurable and appreciable improvements in carbon emissions, economic growth, and air quality². According to the PA Auditor General:

“From 2015-2017, RGGI led to \$1.4 billion of positive economic activity in the then-nine-state region. ... From 2015-17, electricity consumers saved \$99 million and consumers of natural gas and heating oil saved \$121 million.”

RGGI has saved lives. According to a metric called the “mortality cost of carbon”, every 4,434 metric tons of carbon dioxide added to the atmosphere now will cause one excess death globally before 2100, from global heating alone - not counting health impacts from asthma, lung cancer, and so on.³

ABT Associates found the following health benefits from RGGI in a 2017 study:

“Since RGGI started in 2009, the program has raised nearly \$3 billion to support the RGGI states’ investments in energy efficiency, renewable generation, and other public benefit programs, and these states are on track to achieve reductions of GHG emissions of 45 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.”

“300 to 830 lives saved
More than 8,200 asthma attacks avoided
39,000 lost work days averted
\$5.7 billion in health savings and other benefits.”⁴

In his pursuit of “pragmatism” over scientifically sound policymaking, Governor Shapiro is - literally - playing with fire. As Greta Thunberg pointed out, “we cannot make deals with physics.”

² Benefits of RGGI:

https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_Climate_crisis_111219_FINAL.pdf

³ Mortality cost of carbon: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-24487-w>

⁴ ABT Associates report: <https://www.abtassociates.com/rggi>

The secret committee's membership appears to be split about 50/50 between residents who do not have a financial stake in the destruction of Pennsylvania's clean air and water, and corporate lobbyists who do. That is not meeting residents halfway, since most residents are not fossil fuel lobbyists. A more representative proportion would be 0 members who are fossil fuel lobbyists.

This is as if there are 100 chickens and 3 foxes. A secret committee of 3 chickens and 3 foxes is assembled to determine whether or not to build a fence around the chicken coop. Until the committee comes to a consensus - working without any deadline at all - no fence will be built.

History books will record that, during the warmest year in history, in the warmest month in history, while Pennsylvanian skies went red with the remains of burned corpses of trees, the Shapiro administration orchestrated secret meetings where it was debated whether to do too little, or to do nothing at all.

Enough.

Governor Shapiro: disband the secret group, release their minutes, implement RGGI, and get serious.

Statement signed by:



Allegheny County Clean Air Now
Breathe Project
Climate Reality Project: Susquehanna Valley PA Chapter
Climate Reality Project, Greater Harrisburg Chapter
Community Partners in Asthma Care
Green Party of Allegheny County
Group Against Smog & Pollution
FracTracker Alliance
Marcellus Outreach Butler
MarchOnHarrisburg
Mountain Watershed Association
Pennsylvania Action on Climate
Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania
Protect PT
Sunrise Movement Pittsburgh

The Shapiro administration may respond by contacting Tom Pike, Environmental Policy Advocate with Protect PT, at tom@protectpt.org.