

No False Choices: Affordable Utility Bills and a Clean Energy Future

Energy prices in Rhode Island are out of control—just one more rising cost making it more difficult for Rhode Islanders to make ends meet. In 2025, our state got 89% of its electricity from natural gas, and we rank 44th in the nation in energy affordability.

Our current governor celebrated signing a climate pledge into law the last time he was on the ballot in 2022. [At the time, I argued that the governor had no plan to actually meet the goals he bragged about.](#) And now, as prices are skyrocketing and we are back in an election year, Governor McKee has walked back the climate goal that he celebrated just four years ago. Lacking a plan, the governor is creating a false choice between affordable energy and taking action to meet our climate goals. The worst thing we can do to address climate change is nothing; the second worst thing is to set unrealistic goals, fail to meet them, and change plans every election year.

This doesn't have to be the 'either or' choice the governor is making it out to be. And with Rhode Islanders seeing the effects of climate change every day, from rising shorelines to flooding and extreme weather events, it's a choice that we cannot afford to make. With modern technology, renewable energy sources are among the cheapest forms of electricity available. Power from Revolution Wind just came online last month at [9.84 cents per kilowatt hour](#)—almost 40% lower than what Rhode Island Energy customers are currently paying on their bills—and rates will stay that low for the next 20 years. The price of solar is plummeting, with new installations at [6 cents per kilowatt hour](#). The cost of battery storage technology has dropped precipitously—by [45% in just one year from 2024–2025](#).

Aside from the sources of power, ensuring lower rates for Rhode Islanders comes from holding the utility accountable for rate increases. The McKee Administration has allowed Rhode Island Energy and its parent company Pennsylvania Power & Light broad latitude to pass more and more costs on to Rhode Island ratepayers. [Thankfully, our Attorney General has fought to hold them accountable](#) to the tune of tens of millions of saved ratepayer dollars. We need a governor willing to do the same.

My energy plan rejects the premise that clean energy and lower costs are at odds. As governor, I will focus on both lowering the costs that Rhode Islanders are paying on their monthly energy bills and increasing Rhode Island's production of renewable energy to help meet our climate goals. That will require auditing Rhode Island Energy and ensuring rate increases are in the best interests of Rhode Islanders, accelerating the process by which renewable energy projects get connected to the grid, creating a \$40 million program for individuals and small businesses to install solar and batteries and then pay for the systems from their energy savings, putting solar-and-battery installations on 250 schools and municipal buildings, and continuing to fight the Trump Administration's attacks on wind energy in the state. Under my plan, we'll accomplish all of this, and be on our way to a cleaner, lower-cost energy future.

– Helena



HOLD THE POWER COMPANY AND GRID PROVIDER ACCOUNTABLE

It is time for a Governor who will take the driver's seat and ensure Rhode Islanders are getting the best deal possible in terms of energy affordability and reliability. Time and again we have seen our state leaders defer to an electric utility that has its own interests at heart. From [hiking rates](#) on struggling Rhode Islanders to [overbilling the state](#) by millions of dollars to [lobbying against clean energy](#), Rhode Island Energy has consistently shown that a firm partner in the Governor's Office is necessary to make the utility work to meet Rhode Island's goals on both lower costs and lower emissions.

Audit Rhode Island Energy and Require Efficient Use of Ratepayer Dollars

When Rhode Island Energy spends money, the costs get passed along to ratepayers. When they spend money on capital improvements like replacing power lines, they are allowed to charge ratepayers enough to profit from those projects.

As a result, the utility's incentive is to spend inefficiently when it comes to maintaining the grid. The more the utility spends on maintenance, the more they are able to profit. We can fix this with legislation that requires utility spending go toward [necessary capital improvements](#)—with the greatest benefit to energy affordability and reliability for the public.

The Virginia Legislature [just passed important legislation on this front](#), which can be a model for Rhode Island.

We need to better incentivize spending on improvements to energy resilience and distribution, instead of trusting the utility to make the right decisions for Rhode Island's best interests.

Give the State the Tools to Hold Rhode Island Energy Accountable

When Rhode Island Energy asks to charge Rhode Islanders more for energy, it's important that the state is able to accurately evaluate that request. Without the capacity to adequately evaluate [utility justifications for rate increases](#)—and the political will to advocate for Rhode Islanders—the state is left in the dark and ratepayers are left paying for it. But don't take our word for it, [the PUC has said so itself](#), noting that:

With only nine staff members, the Commission faces constraints in handling one-off projects, especially given the need to track down known issues, analyze system-wide risks, and evaluate service and rate impacts, all while managing current workload.

The current inquiry structure—based largely on data requests and technical sessions—is slow and increasingly strained by irregularly timed new information from customers, stakeholders, and company personnel. Managing this evolving data stream places a growing burden on staff and risks inefficient use of time by all parties involved. Without a more structured and proactive approach, the Commission may struggle to provide timely and effective oversight, particularly with a base distribution rate case on the horizon.

Under the status quo, the McKee Administration takes the utility at its word when they jack up prices on Rhode Islanders—and scapegoats clean energy programs with long-term affordability benefits that in reality represent a small portion of Rhode Islanders' bills. We need a state government that is strong enough to hold Rhode Island Energy accountable and protect Rhode Island ratepayers from unnecessary price increases.



Cut Red Tape and Address the Years-Long Interconnection Backlog for Renewables at ISO New England

Often, our debates focus on the different ways we produce energy—like natural gas, solar and wind. But one of the greatest inefficiencies in our electric grid is an interconnection backlog that keeps planned energy projects—including renewables—from being built because they aren't guaranteed access to the grid to deliver electricity to consumers.

Nationwide, [backlogs for regulators to approve grid connections](#) have jumped to five years on average, up from just two years in 2008, severely hampering our ability to provide reliable, affordable, and clean energy to households and businesses.

ISO New England is now working to [address its longstanding interconnection queue backlogs](#) in response to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) new rules, but Rhode Island needs to work with greater urgency to fix these issues.

Instead of devoting limited resources to expensive new transmission lines, Rhode Island should prioritize grid-enhancing technologies (GETs) to significantly increase electrical capacity and bring [“a surge of clean energy projects online.”](#)

A recent [RMI study](#) found that GETs could provide more than \$1 billion in annual savings with an installation cost of just \$100 million—and power five million homes in the process. It is also important that we make it as easy as possible for renewable energy projects to access the grid. As governor, I will work to move these projects along as quickly as possible.

Require Heavy Users to Pay Their Own Way

The rise of artificial intelligence and massive, power-hungry data centers across the country is already [contributing to higher energy bills](#) for households and small businesses, as utilities have passed on tens of billions of dollars in rate increases to consumers.

While some Big Tech companies have [promised to pay](#) for the full cost of their energy needs in a way that doesn't harm consumers, Rhode Island must move proactively to require that heavy energy users [pay their own way](#) and should explore several approaches to [protect ratepayers](#) from cost increases.

The legislature is [already pursuing some of these changes](#). We must act quickly to ensure that consumers are not the ones stuck with the bill for these large data centers.

A DURABLE ENERGY & EMISSIONS PLAN, NOT ELECTION-YEAR GIMMICKS

More than three-quarters of Rhode Islanders reported being [worried about paying their heating bills](#) this winter due to rising energy costs. Some 84% believe their [electric bills are too high](#), and an energy policy that includes renewables is the best solution to addressing those issues. Instead of taking aim at the [underlying causes of rising energy bills](#) for Rhode Islanders, the McKee Administration has proposed to [roll back renewable energy and energy efficiency](#) initiatives, putting us farther from achieving our goals.



The worst thing we can do to address our energy future is nothing, but the second worst thing is to set unrealistic goals and then change plans every few years. Unfortunately, that's exactly what this governor has done. President Trump is trying to destroy green energy with malice; Governor McKee is doing the same with incompetence.

Leave Behind the Governor's On-Again, Off-Again Approach to Climate Goals

Gov. McKee's [election year flip-flop](#) on energy and climate issues is nothing more than a gimmick to win votes while doing little to nothing to address the underlying issues that have created an energy affordability crisis in our state.

Rolling back the state's Renewable Energy Standard (RES) that he signed into law prolongs Rhode Island's reliance on natural gas, which already is a leading reason the state [ranks 44th nationwide](#) in energy affordability.

By implementing a grid access fee for large-scale solar fields, lowering compensation rates for renewable energy projects, and cutting off funding for the state's Renewable Energy Fund by lowering Alternative Compliance Payments (ACPs), the McKee Administration will effectively kill the solar industry and [cause more energy instability](#) in the future. He is undoing his own plan on green energy and now wants credit for calling it cost savings. The state can, and must, do better.

Create a Durable Energy and Emissions Plan for the Next Decade—and Stick To It

Instead of [shortsighted flip-flops](#) on issues like net metering and energy efficiency caps, Rhode Island should commit to a plan that provides long-term savings and more affordable, clean energy going forward.

We can grow Rhode Island's economy, create thousands of good-paying jobs, and invest in the most cost-efficient clean energy technologies that will increase Rhode Island's renewable energy generation, improve energy affordability and prepare our state for climate change at the same time.

Rhode Island must commit to energy policies that ensure long-term economic competitiveness and lessen ratepayers' reliance on expensive, imported natural gas, instead of increasing that reliance.

Push Back Against the Trump Administration's Assault on Wind Energy

The Trump Administration's all-out effort to [gut the offshore wind industry](#) specifically—and [large-scale renewable energy projects](#) more generally – could affect millions of homes and tens of billions of dollars worth of energy infrastructure projects and jobs across the Eastern United States.

Revolution Wind has a fixed-price contract for the next twenty years at 9.84 cents per kilowatt hour. Rhode Island Energy ratepayers are paying [14.770 cents per kilowatt hour](#). Over time, the benefits will increase because wind power generation is not tied to inflation, and will not fluctuate with changes in fuel supply and demand.

As governor, I will do everything in my power to [push back against the Trump Administration's misguided efforts](#) to shut down wind energy production in Rhode Island. We need to invest more, not less, in wind and solar energy in order to diversify our energy portfolio, build a more reliable and affordable energy grid, and create good-paying jobs along the way.



INCREASING RENEWABLE ENERGY GENERATION IN RHODE ISLAND

Invest in the Future by Expanding Municipal Solar and Battery

In rolling back the Act on Climate goal, Governor McKee proposed potentially fatal changes to the solar industry in Rhode Island. Meanwhile, thanks to technology improvements, solar energy generation is one of the most inexpensive forms of new electricity to install. Pairing solar panels with on-site battery storage allows the flexibility to take full advantage of solar power.

Investing in renewable energy sources such as solar isn't just about investing in clean energy; it's also about diversifying our energy mix so that we don't continue to have an "[overwhelming reliance on natural gas](#), which accounts for 89% of [Rhode Island's] electricity production."

Use Public Buildings as Opportunities for Solar Generation

Under my plan, Rhode Island will commit to installing 100 new solar rooftops on public buildings [such as schools](#) and offices in the first year of my administration, and 250 new solar rooftops within the first two years.

When President Trump and the Republican Congress passed their new federal budget in the summer of 2025, they sunset many federal green energy tax credits, [but we have until December 31, 2027 to claim solar production credits](#), making it important to get solar installed as quickly as possible. A similar program in Pennsylvania, "[Solar for Schools](#)" is [helping over 70 schools install solar](#). [Connecticut also has a solid model for green energy for education](#), and while Rhode Island has some funding in this area, it's not enough to get costs down.

Solar energy is one of the fastest and most affordable ways for Rhode Island to add new power to meet rising demand. We need to act quickly to [fast-track more solar development](#) in our state, and we can do so [without increasing energy prices](#) for consumers. This will also create high-quality jobs that can't be exported.

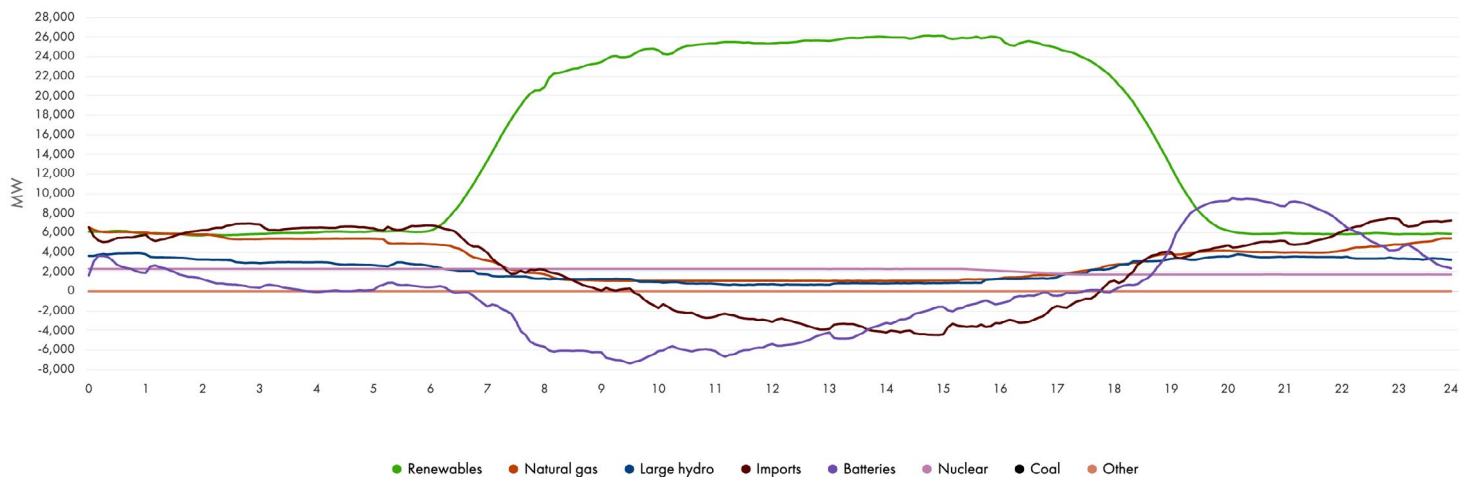
We should also make it easier for families and small businesses to invest in their energy future through [low-cost, plug-in solar energy systems](#), as some two dozen states, including Rhode Island, are considering.

Pair Solar Generation With Onsite Battery Storage

Solar energy prices have been falling for years, finally becoming not only competitive with fossil fuel, but cheaper in many cases. Of course, solar panels only generate power when the sun shines. That is why it is so important to pair solar energy with on-site batteries, which allow us to capture more energy and use it when it is most needed. By pairing solar generation with on-site battery storage, [school districts](#) and municipalities across the state—which have high energy needs during the day and low usage in the evenings—can [avoid peak demand rates](#) on energy usage and create [significant savings](#) for school districts, municipalities, and the state.

We can see this in California's energy use today. While solar exceeds demand in the middle of the day, battery storage is recharged, allowing the use of solar energy to extend well into the night, every single day.





Source: [California ISO Supply and renewables dashboard](#)

This trend is also why [New Jersey is prioritizing storage](#) to help bring down costs. We should do the same here in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island can and should do more to attract and grow globally-competitive businesses in the energy and climate innovation fields, as [Massachusetts is already doing](#), to spur growth and make advances in battery technology that will directly benefit energy consumers in the state, while creating jobs.

Replenish Upfront Investments From Energy Savings

While the state can provide the upfront investment needed to install on-site solar generation and battery storage, doing so will turn schools and other jurisdictions into neighborhood microgrids, producing energy savings that could be used to [pay back the cost of the system](#) over time and, in the long run, create a revenue stream for participants.

Make it Easier for Small Businesses and Residents to Go Green and Save

A war in Iran and Europe and a coup in Venezuela have jolted energy markets and underscored why we must transition away from fossil fuels. Instead of retreating from clean energy like Governor McKee proposes, we can instead invest now to lower our energy costs by increasing solar and batteries, which will reduce peak demand for natural gas. In addition to expanding municipal solar and battery storage to hundreds of schools and municipal buildings across the state, we need to significantly increase funding to help homeowners and small business owners meet the upfront installation costs of doing the same, on a smaller scale, on their own properties.

While several incentive programs exist in Rhode Island currently, including the [Renewable Energy Fund \(REF\) Small-Scale Solar Program](#) and [Rhode Island Energy's Renewable Energy Growth \(REG\) Program](#), the fact remains that we are falling far short of scaling up small-scale renewable energy production in a meaningful way, both for improving affordability and reliability and for meeting emissions goals. By building off of existing programs, we will commit \$20 million in state funding to expand program eligibility and reduce installation costs for both rooftop solar and battery storage for residential homeowners statewide, and an additional \$20 million for small business owners.

