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Residents, Experts Say Bring Back RGGI

Local residents, experts gather in support of anti-pollution program.

By [Liz Alterman](#) [Email the author](#) 7:01 am

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Local residents, environmental leaders, women's groups, public health officials, economists, and other concerned citizens gathered Wednesday in Westfield to voice support for the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and call for a cleaner future for New Jersey.

'Rally for Our Kids' Future,' organized by [Environment New Jersey](#), urged residents to ask Westfield's legislators – Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr., Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick, and Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz – to support a bill that would keep New Jersey in RGGI.

The program, according to ENJ, reduces harmful pollution from power plants and helps grow the state's clean energy economy.

Gov. Chris Christie announced that he hopes to remove the Garden State from the program. Nearly 30 people gathered at the north side of the Westfield train station as the governor hosted a [town hall meeting](#) at the [National Guard Armory](#) in Westfield simultaneously.

RGGI supporters discussed the economic, public health, and environmental benefits of the program.

"The energy decisions we make today will impact the environment and public health for decades to come," said Dan DeRosa of Environment New Jersey. "For the sake of our children and future generations, we must act now to cut pollution and reduce our reliance upon fossil fuels. RGGI does just that. We're here today to call on Senate Minority Leader Kean, Assemblyman Bramnick, and Assemblywoman Munoz to stand up for RGGI and vote to keep New Jersey in the program."

Some speakers highlighted New Jersey's poor air quality and high asthma rates as one reason to remain with the program, since RGGI is one of the state's few tools to control smokestack pollution from power plants. Attendees held posters stating that currently, 165,000 children in New Jersey suffer from asthma.

"As parents, we put our trust in elected officials to keep our air and water safe and clean," said Harriet Shugarman of ClimateMama. "Yet, by taking New Jersey out of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and not limiting power plant emissions, nor requiring polluters to pay for polluting our air, our governor is effectively telling polluters they can treat the air our children breath as an open sewer; a sewer polluters are using and abusing, free of charge. We wouldn't stand for this in our homes or our children's schools, why should the Governor ask us to allow this in our children's playgrounds and open spaces? This is way I am standing up to the governor and asking you to as well. Support the RGGI which caps power plant pollution, requires polluters to pay for fouling our air, and invests that money in clean energy, right here in New Jersey."

"Air pollution doesn't respect political or geographic boundaries. New Jersey should continue its commitment to the other northeastern states as they lead the nation's efforts to reduce green house gas emissions and create clean energy jobs," said Kerry Butch of the League of Women Voters. "The reduction of 84,000 tons of CO2 emissions and the \$952 million raised for energy efficiency projects and energy assistance to limited income families

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potential program costs.

"It is tempting to suggest that environmental concerns can wait until the economy recovers," said Rutgers University economist Bruce Mizrach.

"However, climate science suggests that our time to act is limited, and programs like RGGI are a proven solution. The legislature should make clear to the Governor that the most efficient way to subsidize green energy, lessen our dependence on Middle East oil, and reduce carbon pollution is to put a price on emissions."

Other speakers addressed the need to tackle global warming, as carbon dioxide (the pollutant regulated by RGGI) is the leading cause of global warming. If left unchecked, global warming will cause more heat- and smog-related deaths, disrupt New Jersey's rich agriculture economy, and threaten the state's \$30 billion shore-based tourism economy with rising seas and more frequent storms, according to ENJ.

"Addressing global warming will be one of the most challenging things we will ever have to do in our lifetimes. Without RGGI it will be almost impossible," said Matt Polsky of Fairleigh Dickinson University's Institute for Sustainable Enterprise. "Increasing numbers of businesses now see the importance of public policies that facilitate their own efforts to reduce carbon emissions, and actually make it profitable for them to do so--like RGGI."

"RGGI is a key to combating climate change and also means healthier air, greener jobs, reduced dependence on fossil fuel, and increased national security. This shouldn't be a partisan issue. Any legislator, and every legislator should be, concerned about these issues, should support it," said David Pringle of the New Jersey Environmental Federation.

A number of local residents and concerned citizens also attended the event. Westfield resident and college student Stephanie Quinton said removing New Jersey from RGGI would "allow power plants to create more pollution that is put into our air."

"I am a local resident of Westfield and environmental activist," she continued. "I'm also a student who cares deeply about our future, and I want to grow up in a cleaner, greener New Jersey. I love my community and my state and as I grow up here, I don't want to see it deteriorate due to lack of environmentally-friendly initiatives."

Jeff Tittel of the New Jersey Sierra Club echoed the sentiments of other speakers and called on legislators to keep New Jersey in RGGI.

"We are here today because we need Senator Tom Kean to show leadership on our environment and economy by supporting the RGGI bill, S1322. RGGI has worked and delivered on its promise by creating 1772 jobs in our state, saving customers \$1.1 billion on their electric bills and \$174 million on gas bills, and reducing climate change pollution. We cannot go at it alone on climate change and with Senator Tom Kean's support we can send a message to Governor Christie that we need to become part of RGGI again."

Environment New Jersey's Dan DeRosa concluded the event by highlighting the elected officials' past support for the environment and clean energy.

"We are here in Westfield today because these legislators have been champions for our environment in the past, and we need them now, more than ever, to stand up for RGGI and continue their pro-environment leadership," he said. "In 2004 Senator Kean championed and Assemblyman Bramnick supported the Clean Cars Act, bringing cleaner cars to our roadways and slowly revolutionizing the car market.

"In 2007 both Senator Kean and Assemblyman Bramnick supported the Global Warming Response Act – setting New Jersey some of the strongest global warming reduction goals in the entire country – 20 percent by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050. And again, in 2010 Senator Kean, Assemblyman Bramnick, and Assemblywoman Munoz supported a bill to bring enough offshore wind to New Jersey by 2020 to power more than 400,000 New Jersey homes."

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