

N.Y. Governor Calls For Renewables, Smart Grid

by Joseph Bebon

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In his newly released 2013 state agenda, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, D-N.Y., calls for clean energy initiatives, grid modernization and the privatization of the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA), among other goals.

Under his plan, Cuomo has introduced a \$1 billion “green bank” that will leverage public- and private-sector funds to help boost the state’s clean energy economy. The governor also plans to extend the NY-SUN program, an initiative to increase the amount of solar installations in New York, at \$150 million annually for 10 years, as well as to create a Charge NY Program that will help install electric vehicle (EV) charging stations and offer tax credits for related infrastructure.

In addition, Cuomo named Richard Kauffman, a senior advisor to U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Steven Chu, as an energy czar in the governor’s cabinet. According to Cuomo, Kauffman will “coordinate the state’s cleantech agenda and oversee the state government’s energy portfolio.”

Following Hurricane Sandy, the governor also emphasizes in his plan the need for grid resiliency and infrastructure upgrades. According to the agenda, the state’s grid must “undergo a fundamental redesign that improves performances and protects ratepayers.” For example, Cuomo calls for the increased usage of alternative distributed energy, such as renewables and energy storage, in order to create less reliance on centralized power facilities and mitigate power outages.

The governor’s plans for more renewables and a smarter grid, which Cuomo presented during his State of the State address on Wednesday, have drawn praise from advocacy groups.

“The governor’s proposal to create a green bank is an innovative approach to spurring greater investment in clean energy, and we look forward to working with the Cuomo administration on its successful development,” said Valerie Strauss, interim executive director of the Alliance for Clean Energy New York, in a statement.

“Now is the time to extend and expand the state’s renewable portfolio standard, including solar power and onshore and offshore wind energy, and we hope to see the green bank and all of New York’s clean energy programs complement and enhance one another in a way that facilitates full development of our renewable resources,” she added.

In a separate statement, New York State Smart Grid Consortium Chairman Robert B. Catell said, “We applaud Gov. Cuomo’s bold energy initiatives as outlined in his State of the State, in particular his vision for a new energy czar, his ambitious plans for a nation-leading electric vehicle infrastructure and his call to strengthen New York’s energy infrastructure.”

“The leadership of the governor and his new energy czar, Richard Kauffman, will be essential in developing a coherent pathway to efficiently and effectively build a 21st-century smart electric grid from which all New Yorkers can reap the benefits.”

Post-Sandy backlash, part 2

Renewables may fare well in Cuomo’s new plans, but the state’s utilities do not. In November, the governor publicly denounced New York’s utility bodies for their responses to Hurricane Sandy and established the Moreland Commission to investigate the companies’ pre- and post-storm efforts.

Along with that came the tendered resignation of LIPA’s chief operating officer Mike Hervey and subpoenas to both LIPA and Consolidate Edison from New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman.

According to Cuomo, Hurricane Sandy underscored how the state’s utility system is dysfunctional. Now, based on recommendations from the Moreland Commission, the governor wants to give the New York Public Service Commission the “regulatory and enforcement teeth it needs to improve oversight and regulation of the state’s utilities.”

Municipal utility LIPA, which serves more than 1.1 million customers in Nassau and Suffolk counties and the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens, N.Y., is under particularly harsh scrutiny for its response to Sandy. Also based on the Moreland Commission’s recommendations, Cuomo is calling for the privatization of the utility, claiming that the company has systemic flaws.

“When it comes to the Long Island Power Authority, it has never worked, it never will; the time has come to abolish LIPA, period,” Cuomo said in his State of the State address.

When contacted for comment on Cuomo’s plan, LIPA told *Renew Grid* in an email, “We will continue to cooperate with the State to do what is in the best interest of Long Island’s electric customers.”