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NY's economy's need reliable energy — including biofuels | Opinion

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John Ravitz Special to the USA TODAY Network

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The conversation about energy in New York has thankfully reached a moment of pragmatic reckoning. A bipartisan consensus is emerging among Gov. Kathy Hochul and state lawmakers that they must broaden the state's climate strategy because relying exclusively on electrification, which is increasingly hampered by the federal administration's attacks on the renewable energy sector, is no longer feasible.

A pragmatic, all-of-the-above energy strategy that shores up reliability and helps manage soaring costs doesn't only use the well-known tools at our disposal; it must also encourage adoption of emerging resources. That includes using biofuels, a diesel replacement made from sources like used cooking oil, recycled restaurant grease, animal fats and other waste streams that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 86%.

Biofuels prove their value to New York

Biofuels are already proving their value here in Westchester, where the County Airport and Croton-on-Hudson are using them to reduce their carbon footprints. The Port Authority has adopted renewable diesel, as has New York City for its emergency and heavy-duty fleets, preventing more than 162 million pounds of carbon emissions annually. And the new State Energy Plan approved in December makes clear that these low-carbon fuels are an important complement to the overall state energy strategy.

These fuels are a fully compatible, plug-and-play solution for existing infrastructure — not just in transportation fleets, but also in building heat systems. This compatibility is critical, mitigating costly fleet or building-heat system modifications.

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Biofuel demonstrates real promise of helping businesses reduce emissions without the worry that comes with going all-electric. There could not be clearer warnings that electric demand will nearly double over the next two decades without the generation in place for electric supply to keep up. That risks not just preventing our existing business community from making a clean energy switch, it also serves to prevent companies from pursuing New York as a viable place to set up new operations.

We need all-of-the-above solutions at a time when 72% of businesses statewide, including many here in Westchester, recently said in a state Business Council survey that current economic conditions are unfavorable. The consensus was that New York must make immediate improvements around population loss and the high cost of doing business, while mitigating worrisome energy policies.

Advancing policies that make biofuels more accessible is a common-sense solution. The State Energy Plan acknowledges this by outlining that policy should not stifle deployment, noting that new “mandates, market-based mechanisms, and incentives” would be needed to ensure adequate supply of low-carbon fuels.

Ultimately, expanding the use of biofuels can be a powerful economic catalyst. Their deployment not only cuts carbon emissions but also fuels job creation and spurs innovation across key sectors, from domestic agriculture and local fuel distribution to transportation and advanced clean-tech innovation.

When lawmakers return to Albany, they should prioritize policies like a low-carbon fuel standard that would help expand availability of biofuels by signaling to producers that New York is fully open for business. A similar program in California is currently driving the bulk of the biofuel supply to the West Coast, dramatically reducing emissions there.

Opinion: [New York's energy policy undermines our economic development](#)

NY can't turn its back on clean energy options

Westchester County — and New York as a whole — can't afford to turn its back on a full suite of clean energy options at a time when our region is facing rising energy costs and an intensifying climate crisis. What's more, failing to shore up our energy supply at a time when our region and state is poised for transformational economic growth — from revitalizing our downtowns to investing billions in the biotech and semiconductor sectors — only jeopardizes our ability to tackle the affordability challenges New Yorkers face.

Embracing biofuels as part of an all-of-the-above energy strategy is forward-looking leadership that represents progress over paralysis. We don't have to choose between economic development and environmental responsibility. We can, and must, achieve both.

John Ravitz serves as the executive vice president and COO of the Business Council of Westchester.