

End to nuclear plant ban signed by West Virginia governor

February 9 2022, by John Raby



West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice gives his State of the State speech in the House Chambers, Thursday, Jan. 27, 2022, at the West Virginia State Capitol in Charleston, W.Va. Credit: Chris Dorst/Charleston Gazette-Mail via AP

West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice on Tuesday signed a bill eliminating the

state's ban on nuclear power plants but cautioned against jumping in to diversify the coal-dependent state's energy offerings.

Justice said in a letter that any development or placement of nuclear technologies in West Virginia "must be done thoughtfully and, above all, safely."

The Republican governor said lawmakers must continue to research and monitor nuclear initiatives "to ensure appropriate regulatory or safety measures are in place as new technologies are developed and implemented."

Justice called the bill "a positive step" in modernizing the state's regulatory environment, but said "we must work to ensure only positive outcomes from this legislation by continually evaluating any concerns and implementing best practices in any regulation that may be required."

The state's ban on [nuclear plants](#) was enacted in 1996, but [nuclear power](#) has in recent years [gained support as a tool to keep climate change under control](#), with proponents noting that it emits few planet-damaging emissions and is safer on average than nearly any other energy source.

West Virginia is the nation's second-largest coal producer, behind Wyoming, and accounted for 5% of the nation's total energy production in 2019, ranking fifth among the states, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

But West Virginia has lost thousands of coal jobs in the past decade as companies and utilities explore using other energy sources such as natural gas, solar and wind.

According to the Nuclear Energy Institute, coal provides 88% of West Virginia's energy needs, followed by 5% from [natural gas](#), 3.3% from

wind, 3.1% from hydroelectric and 0.2% from other [energy sources](#).

There are [nuclear power plants](#) in 28 states, although Georgia is the only state with a nuclear project currently under construction. Among surrounding states, there are a combined 8,500 nuclear energy jobs in Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia, according to the NEI.

Some states are transitioning away from carbon dioxide-emitting fossil fuels to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stave off the worst effects of a warming planet.

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