

Bill Clinton joins Hochul, Adams to unveil plan for making NY high-rises carbon neutral

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Former President Bill Clinton joined Gov. Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams at the Empire State Building on Thursday to roll out a

blueprint for how to make high-rises in New York carbon neutral as the threat of greenhouse-gas-fueled climate change continues to grow increasingly dire.

Nearly half of New York's energy-related fossil fuel emissions come from buildings, and the "Empire Building Challenge" plan unveiled by Hochul, Adams and Clinton aims to overhaul that reality while also spurring [economic growth](#) from [new jobs](#) required for the green retrofitting projects.

"If you believe New York should have more jobs, if you believe that we should avoid the worst consequences of climate change, if you don't want to see the rising waters flood the south end of Manhattan, if you hate all these horrible things—do this," Clinton said, standing alongside Hochul and Adams on the observation deck of the Empire State Building, which is among 131 high-rises to have initially signed up for the carbon neutral pledge.

Spearheaded by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, the effort will pour \$300 million—\$50 million of which is contributed by taxpayers—into retrofitting buildings across the state.

Partners in the challenge are eligible to receive \$5 million each to implement their carbon-neutral reconstruction proposals, which will undergo vetting by the state, according to a memo from the Energy Research and Development Authority.

The first 131 high-rises that have signed up comprise 130 million square feet of [building](#) space. They are expected to achieve carbon neutrality within the next 10 to 15 years under the blueprint, and Hochul said she hopes the first batch of partners will serve as inspiration for more building owners to join the mission.

"Yes, it sounds bold. Yes, it sounds audacious, and it sounds very New York—that's what we do here. We set high goals and we will achieve them," Hochul said.

Another prominent building to have already signed up for the pledge is the Bank of America Tower in Midtown.

The Empire Building Challenge comes on top of Local 97, a bill signed into law by former Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2019 that will place strict greenhouse gas emissions caps on all buildings in the city larger than 25,000 square feet beginning in 2024.

The legislation staked out a path for making the caps even stricter in 2030, and building owners who don't abide by the emissions rules are supposed to face hefty fines.

But Rit Aggarwala, Mayor Adams' chief climate officer, recently testified before the Council that the administration is exploring the option of giving reprieve from fines to building owners who can't comply with the caps despite "doing everything possible."

While most speakers at Thursday's Empire State Building event focused their remarks on the urgency of curbing fossil fuel emissions, Adams sought to expand the scope by declaring that conversations around climate must also include [social issues](#) like education, crime and job training.

"When we talk about changing the climate, we focus on for the most part, changing the [physical environment](#)—the smog, the air, the carbon—but I am saying we need to look beyond that," he said. "As we improve the environment and the air we breathe we need to change the climate of those who watch buildings go up and their futures go down."

Clinton, who spoke after Adams, steered the conversation back to the topic at hand and said the Empire Building Challenge will ultimately only be successful if it attracts mass participation.

"We don't have any excuses," the ex-president said. "So every one of us has to go get more buildings, or building owners. Our grandchildren are depending on it."

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