PENNSYLVANIA MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION
PA PUBLIC POWER

# THE LIVE WIRE

October 2026



## Save these Dates!

**Spring Superintendents Meeting – April 8 & 9, 2027**
**Nittany Lion Inn, State College**

**PMEA Reception @ PSAB Annual Conference *(*tentative)***
**Hershey Lodge, Hershey**

**PMEA 2027 Annual Conference – September 8 – 10, 2027**
**Omni Bedford Springs, Bedford**

**PMEA Business Workshop**
**– September 8, 2027 @ Omni Bedford Springs, Bedford**

**2027 Training for Line Crews**
***Classes and dates to be announced soon***

## Oakes Recognized for Managerial Excellence



Vance Oakes, Manager for the Borough of Grove City and PMEA Board member, is the inaugural recipient of the AMP (American Municipal Power) Managerial Excellence award. He is recognized for nearly two decades of steady leadership across the borough's electric, water, and wastewater utilities, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and reliability.

Congratulations Vance!

## Stonehill Elected to APPA Board



The American Public Power Association recently elected four new members to its Board of Directors at its fall board meeting in Asheville, North Carolina. Jeffrey Stonehill, Borough Manager and Director of Utilities for the Borough of Chambersburg, was selected to represent Region 8.

“APPA's success depends on strong leaders who are committed to serving public power as well as their communities," said Mike Peters, chair of the APPA Board of Directors and president and CEO of WPPI Energy. "Cory, Joel, Jeff, and James bring valuable experience and perspectives to the board. We look forward to their contributions as APPA continues to advocate for public power utilities across the country."

The APPA Board of Directors comprises utility leaders and policymakers from public power communities across the nation.

The Board provides strategic guidance and governance for the association and helps shape APPA's advocacy, education, and member service priorities.

Congratulations to Jeffrey!

# With a Trifecta, PA Democrats Would Pass Energy Reforms & Rein in Data Centers

It's been more than three decades since Democrats held a trifecta in Pennsylvania, but the prospect of a blue wave in next month's elections has Gov. Josh Shapiro and party leadership optimistic that their time could come in Harrisburg.

After flipping the state House of Representatives in 2022, Democrats now have a chance to take advantage of flagging support for President Donald Trump and Shapiro's positive favorability to gain control of the state Senate for the first time since 1993. If the gridlock breaks, legislators and environmental advocates see an opportunity to advance long-stalled proposals on renewable energy, data centers, and greenhouse gas reductions.

"I think of it as a tectonic shift in Pennsylvania environmental politics," PennEnvironment executive director David Masur said about a potential trifecta. "It's a generational shift, and it really changes the playing field with the opportunity to move toward a green majority in the legislature."

For years, Democratic legislators have operated with an "imaginative constraint" because of their inability to move bills through both chambers, said Sen. Nikil Saval, a Democrat from Philadelphia who is a member of the environmental resources and energy committee. If they secure the trifecta, quick action is possible on several House bills that have been blocked by a Republican-controlled Senate for the past four years, addressing solar power, siting reform for energy projects and guard rails for data center development.

Given the recent price hikes ratepayers have seen in their energy bills, offering relief would likely be among Democrats' first priorities if they control the state government. One in four Pennsylvania families are struggling to pay their energy bills, and one in 20 carries significant utility debt.

"Energy has become a kitchen-table issue," said Elowyn Corby, senior regional director for the Mid-Atlantic at nonprofit Vote Solar.

In this environment, community solar is the type of "low-hanging fruit" that should quickly move through the legislature, Saval said. Legislation that passed the House with support from more than a dozen Republicans would allow Pennsylvanians to subscribe to a local array and cut costs on their electricity bills. Several neighboring states have already opened the door to the practice.

Similarly, Democrats and advocates point to battery storage as a sensible solution with a clear path to law. Earlier this month the House passed a bill with bipartisan support that would require electric utilities to store energy for use during peak periods to lower overall costs and improve reliability. A proposal to make warehouses solar-ready has also sat in the Senate after clearing the House and could complement other actions on energy policy.

Rep. Elizabeth Fiedler, a Democrat from Philadelphia and chair of the House energy committee and co-sponsor of the battery storage bill, highlighted another idea to lower ratepayers' bills: her proposal to rein in utilities' profits by ensuring that their rates of return equal their demonstrated capital costs. That bill passed the House unanimously in June and has been stuck in the Senate since.

"Regardless of the election's outcome, I believe our mission remains to do everything we can on the energy committee to lower peoples' utility bills, generate more energy to meet demand, and hold big corporations accountable," Fiedler said in a statement.

In the interest of energy generation, Rep. Mandy Steele, a Democrat from Allegheny County, has proposed a bill that would prevent municipalities from passing blanket prohibitions against renewable energy projects. This bill could be a "starting point," Saval said. Pennsylvania is among a small number of states that lack a statewide energy siting policy, making it a target for reform.

"It would lower our energy bills in noticeable ways," said Alex Bomstein, executive director of nonprofit Clean Air Council. "It would make our air cleaner. It would be a huge deal."

Democrats could also approach renewable energy by updating the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard, which sets requirements for the portion of the energy grid composed of renewable energy. Pennsylvania ranks 47th nationally in renewable energy growth, in large part because the standard has "flatlined," allowing utilities to maintain the status quo, Masur said.

Of course, skyrocketing utility bills are inextricable from the proliferation of power-hungry data centers. There are already 70 in the state, and 93 more projects are proposed, according to the Data Center Tracker, heaping unprecedented demand on a grid already forecast by the Public Utility Commission to face 13 annual outages by 2030. Legislators and advocates said a House-approved proposal to regulate data centers and limit their impact on electricity bills could pass in a Democratic trifecta.

The environmental concerns around data centers go well beyond electricity. Rep. Danielle Friel Otten, Democrat from Chester County, said the Pennsylvania Water Resource Act, which she introduced in May, would be an important companion to any legislation, imposing a fee on users withdrawing more than 10,000 gallons per day.

"There's an opportunity there to hold these large water users accountable and make it more expensive to do consumptive use in Pennsylvania," she said.

Data centers are a key issue for Pennsylvania voters. Nearly three-quarters said they would oppose having one built in their community, according to a recent Quinnipiac poll. The stiff public opposition has given rise to calls for a moratorium on new data center construction.

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## Legislative Control *(continued)*

"We should push pause until and unless the industry can show that their negative effects on the environment and public health and our pocketbooks can get resolved," Masur said.

And yet legislators and advocates said a moratorium is unlikely, given Shapiro's extensive courtship of the industry—even despite his recent executive order that requires local approval for projects to receive state permits.

"He is the limiting factor," said Sen. Katie Muth, a Democrat who represents parts of Berks, Montgomery and Chester counties.

A governor-approved moratorium of any kind is hard to envision, Masur said: "How much pivoting can you do in six months?"

Ahead of a potential presidential run, a trifecta would hand Shapiro a golden opportunity to make good on his "get shit done" slogan with action on climate and environmental issues, Masur said. Shapiro's proposed energy reforms include the Pennsylvania Reliable Energy Sustainability Standard (PRESS), which would add nuclear power, fusion and "clean forms of natural gas" to the state's alternative energy portfolio, and the Pennsylvania Climate Emissions Reduction Act (PACER), a state-specific cap-and-trade program.

But assuming Democrats hold narrow margins in the House and Senate, getting much done without upsetting key factions—from labor unions to fossil fuel-friendly legislators—will not be easy. If the moment suggests the prospect of transformational progress, Pennsylvanians may have to settle for incremental gains instead.

"It's not like the next day solar farms spring up everywhere and wind and battery storage as far as the eye can see," Saval said.

Pennsylvania's environmentalists also have good reason to question whether Shapiro has their interests in mind after his "bait and switch" on the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative last year, Vote Solar's Corby said. He backed out of the agreement to cut carbon emissions from power plants in a budget deal that critics said sacrificed climate action to restore normal state funding.

"Pennsylvanians are not just eager for progress but also rightfully demanding it," Corby said.

Although legislation has consistently stalled in the Senate in recent sessions, the House has developed "a very compelling narrative of preparation," Corby said, paving the way for a trifecta to move bills with far-reaching potential on energy, climate, and the environment. The question remains whether they would have the right leaders in place—whether in the governor's office or in key House and Senate positions—to deliver.

Muth, an outspoken critic of her colleagues on both sides of the aisle, said the public should expect bills framed around environmental protections that are nonetheless industry approved.

"People feel they have a right to live in a safe and healthy place and, unfortunately, the legislature is not making that very easy," she said. "The heat is still going to have to be applied to the people holding power, regardless of party."

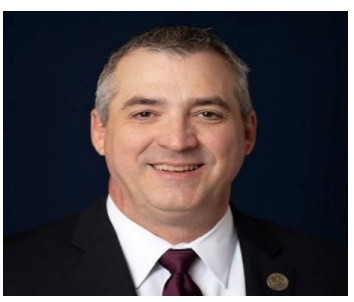
For his part, Saval said he wants the legislature to take seriously the opportunity "to render life for Pennsylvanians healthier, more sustainable, safer and cleaner." Flipping the Senate and securing the trifecta would be a significant step in that direction.

"There have been strong efforts to get the legislature to serve that responsibility," Saval said, "and we are in the process of removing one, if not all of the obstacles."

*Source: Ben Seal, Inside Climate News, October 21, 2026*

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# PUC Chairman DeFrank Elected President of Organization of PJM States



At a pivotal time for the future of Pennsylvania's energy grid, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) **Chairman Steve DeFrank** has been elected president of the Organization of PJM States, Inc. (OPSI), giving Pennsylvania a prominent leadership role in regional discussions about rising electricity costs, growing energy needs, and decisions shaping the future of the regional power system.

DeFrank's election comes as Pennsylvania and neighboring states face critical decisions about how to meet growing electricity demand, accommodate new energy development, maintain dependable electric service, and protect families and businesses from unnecessary energy costs.

"Pennsylvania has always been a leader in energy, and as our electric grid undergoes a historic transformation, we need a strong voice in the decisions shaping its future, and that of the PJM region," said **Governor Josh Shapiro.** "For too long, Pennsylvanians have faced rising electric bills without seeing the improvements in reliability they deserve. We have an opportunity — and a responsibility — to get this right by protecting families and businesses from unnecessary costs, bringing new energy resources online, and making sure the grid works for the 67 million people

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## PUC Chairman *(continued)*

who rely on it. That means OPSI and the Governors' Collaborative have critical work to do right now, as Chairman DeFrank takes on this important new role."

As president of OPSI, Chairman DeFrank will help lead collaboration among state utility regulators across the PJM region. That leadership will help ensure that Pennsylvania and other states have a strong voice in regional decisions about electric markets, infrastructure investment, and the costs ultimately borne by consumers.

**Pennsylvania's Voice in Regional Energy Decisions**
Pennsylvania plays a central role in the PJM Interconnection region, serving as a major producer and exporter of electricity while also supporting a diverse mix of energy resources, major industries, and millions of residential and business customers.

As the regional grid evolves, decisions involving electric generation, transmission infrastructure, large new electricity loads, and the allocation of costs will have far-reaching implications for Pennsylvania consumers and the Commonwealth's economy.

OPSI provides a forum for state utility regulators throughout the PJM region to coordinate on these issues, exchange perspectives, and engage collectively in matters involving PJM and federal energy regulators.

DeFrank's presidency will help ensure that Pennsylvania remains actively engaged in those discussions while strengthening cooperation among states with shared interests in protecting consumers, supporting responsible energy development, and addressing the challenges facing our regional electric grid.

**About OPSI and PJM**
The Organization of PJM States, Inc. (OPSI) is an association of state utility regulatory commissions within the PJM Interconnection region. OPSI promotes cooperation and communication among its member commissions on matters related to PJM's operation of the regional electric grid and wholesale electricity markets.

Through its work, OPSI provides state regulators with opportunities to share information, coordinate positions where appropriate, and strengthen the role of states in regional and federal energy discussions.

PJM Interconnection coordinates wholesale electricity markets and operates the high-voltage electric transmission system serving all or parts of 13 states and the District of Columbia, including Pennsylvania.

*Source: PUC Press Release, October 1, 2026*

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# PJM Issues Alerts Warning of Tight Electricity Supplies

The grid operator serving much of the mid-Atlantic and Midwest warned that warm weather and maintenance outages could push the system close to its limits.

On Oct. 12, PJM Interconnection alerted power plant owners and utilities to take steps to avoid rolling blackouts as demand approaches the grid's current maximum capacity. It asked them to suspend maintenance and keep generators online where possible through Oct. 14. PJM said it has recalled or canceled transmission and generation outages to the extent possible, and it expects generation capacity to be reduced by 62,000 megawatts during the alert.

Also on Oct. 12, the U.S. Department of Energy issued an emergency order at PJM's request. The order allows PJM to direct power plants to operate as needed, including beyond air pollution limits. It also lets PJM direct data centers and other large users to switch to on-site backup generators before resorting to rolling blackouts, and to curtail electricity exports outside its coverage area.

Energy Secretary Chris Wright said the order will help ensure millions of American families and businesses have access to affordable, reliable electricity by making more generation, including backup power, available. He said the Trump administration is committed to using every available tool to prevent blackouts, and he blamed past leaders' energy policies for making the grid more vulnerable when the sun does not shine or the wind does not blow.

In an Oct. 11 letter to the DOE requesting the measures, PJM warned that the combined effects of higher demand, maintenance and significant export obligations could leave the grid within 900 megawatts of its reserve margin, roughly the equivalent of one large power plant.

**A "New Reality" for Grid Operators**
PJM spokesman Jeffrey Shields said the conditions are being felt by grid operators nationwide. Base load demand is rising faster than new generating capacity can be added, he said, while unpredictable weather is shrinking the window for maintenance. He expressed confidence that PJM's procedures, together with the DOE orders, give it enough tools to maintain reserves and operate reliably. He added that PJM is working with state and federal policymakers to boost supply, including by speeding up the connection process for new plants and removing state permitting barriers outside PJM's jurisdiction.

**Disagreement Over Causes**
Jon Gordon of the renewable energy group Advanced Energy United said an energy emergency in autumn is unusual, since moderate weather typically eases demand. "What's usually a routine maintenance season is now an emergency," he said, calling it a reflection of tightening supply on the PJM grid.

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## PJM Alerts on Electricity Supplies *(continued)*

Gordon placed the blame on PJM's handling of a flood of renewable projects seeking grid connections. The organization was overwhelmed and closed its interconnection queue from 2022 until earlier this year while it cleared the backlog and reformed its procedures. In July, PJM also fell 6,800 megawatts short of its goal for procuring standby capacity in its annual capacity auction. Gordon said that shortfall is a large amount of generation PJM wanted but did not get, and the consequences are now showing.

PJM reopened the queue in April, accepting 811 new projects totaling 220,000 megawatts of potential capacity. Under the reformed process, it prioritizes projects that are further along and better positioned to be completed, considering factors such as up-front financial commitments and land ownership.

David Masur of PennEnvironment said the crisis stems from a lack of foresight by PJM. While the queue was closed, older fossil fuel plants kept retiring, reducing overall capacity, and lead times for key components such as turbines and transformers grew longer, slowing new construction. He argued that PJM has favored natural gas plants over wind, solar and battery storage, which he described as cheaper, faster, and cleaner. Policymakers and advocates have pushed these ideas for years, he said, and meeting demand on an emergency basis leads to decisions that are more expensive and dirtier for ratepayers.

**Second Alert This Fall**
The Oct. 12 alert is the second this fall asking plant and transmission operators to stay online during a forecast demand spike. On Sept. 17, PJM issued a maximum generation alert and a load management alert. PJM said tighter conditions were driven by electricity exports to southern and western regions experiencing unseasonably hot weather, along with planned outages as the maintenance season began.

*Source: Peter Hall, Pennsylvania Capital-Star, October 13, 2026.*

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# PUC Advances Consumer Safeguards as Data Center Growth Adds New Demands to Electric Grid

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (PUC) voted 4-0 to approve a Tentative Order seeking public comment on proposed safeguards to protect consumers and preserve electric reliability when electricity supplies are strained. The proposals change how Pennsylvania electric distribution companies prepare for and respond to tight supply, including new procedures for large loads such as data centers.

The central principle is that certain large new loads that have not secured sufficient new electric capacity would be curtailed before other customers when additional load reductions are needed. The Commission also proposes that data centers and similar large loads not be classified as critical loads exempt from curtailment during pre-emergency or emergency events.

**Why now**
The action builds on a Sept. 10 motion by Vice Chair Barrow, unanimously approved, directing PUC staff to outline updates to utilities' emergency load-control procedures. It also follows an independent PUC-commissioned analysis warning that rapidly growing demand, driven largely by data centers, could create serious reliability risks if supply does not keep pace. In the study's reference scenario, the regional grid fails to meet PJM's reliability planning standard from 2027 through 2030, with modeled risk by 2030 nearly six times that standard.

**What utilities would be required to do?**
PJM Interconnection, the grid operator for Pennsylvania, 12 other states and the District of Columbia, has proposed an Interim Resource Adequacy Service (IRAS) to help manage periods when available resources may not meet demand. Under the Tentative Order, utilities would:

- Identify large loads – Develop and maintain a registry of large loads within their service territories, giving utilities, PJM, and the PUC better information to prepare for rapidly growing electricity demand.
- Plan for potential curtailments – Establish clear procedures for identifying and notifying large-load customers that may be required to reduce their electricity use when PJM determines that additional load reductions are needed to maintain reliability.
- Prioritize large-load reductions – Establish procedures to reduce eligible new large loads that have not secured sufficient new electric capacity before shedding load from other customers during an IRAS event.
- Strengthen emergency protections – Update pre-emergency and emergency procedures so that large loads such as data centers are not classified as critical load exempt from curtailment during those events.

**Broader PUC efforts**
This is one part of a larger effort that includes a model tariff requiring customers using 50 megawatts or more to bear the costs they add to the system, implementation of Act 45 of 2025 (stronger oversight of utility load forecasts submitted to PJM), and actions on PJM's proposed Reliability Backstop Procurement and IRAS. The PUC will also hold a Technical Conference on Nov. 17 on allocating costs of large computational loads.

**Next steps**
The Tentative Order will be published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, opening a 30-day comment period followed by 15 days for reply comments. The Commission anticipates considering a Final Order at its Jan. 28, 2027, public meeting, directing utilities to file updated procedures.

*Source: PUC Press Release, October 1, 2026.*

## Associate Member Spotlight

Sunbelt Solomon offers complete lifecycle solutions. With the largest inventory of new and expertly remanufactured electrical distribution equipment in the Americas, we have the solutions you need to keep your business connected.

From clearing out unused units to offloading old equipment, our dedicated surplus buying team provides you the peace of mind that your equipment will be responsibly manufactured or retired. From pick-up to payment, you can trust that the process will be seamless.

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## Share Your News….

Please share with us your exciting new projects, photos, personnel updates, and any other news! Your submissions should be sent to **bosak@papublicpower.org** at any time and they will be used in upcoming editions. We also welcome your suggestions for topics of interest for our newsletters.

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