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\$200M push for thermal networks Energy systems could be part of upgrades for SUNY campuses

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ALBANY - Lawmakers are pushing for \$200 million in the state budget to build thermal energy networks, including \$24 million for Stony Brook University and \$25 million for Farmingdale State College.

Thermal energy networks are emission-free infrastructure projects that use water-filled pipes to transfer heat for heating and cooling. Some networks include geothermal energy, which uses the temperature of the Earth for heating and cooling.

Democrats, who hold a majority in the State Senate and Assembly, included funding to build out thermal energy networks at SUNY campuses and some municipalities in their one-house budget proposals.

"Whenever you're moving away from using . . . fossil fuel, you're moving in the right direction," Assemb. John McDonald III (D-Cohoes) told Newsday. "The reality is - I know people don't like to hear this - there will never be an elimination of fossil fuels, but whenever we can put forth more cost-effective, cleaner energy, our society and environment is all the better for it."

The thermal energy networks would help lower carbon emissions, reduce the strain on the power grid and lower utility costs, Allison Considine, New York director for the Building Decarbonization Coalition, told Newsday.

Thermal energy also creates "great paying" jobs for union laborers, such as plumbers and pipe fitters, said Sen. Mario Mattera (R-St. James), who served for decades as a leader of Plumbers Local Union No. 200. The networks can even use the heat extracted from wastewater, said Mattera, the ranking Republican on the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee. "This is saving our environment in so many ways."

The measure is being pushed by UpgradeNY, a collaboration of environmental and union groups.

Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, did not include the \$200 million for the thermal energy networks in her more than \$260 billion spending plan. The Legislature on Monday passed a third budget extender as negotiations continue past the April 1 budget deadline. Climate goals The push to increase thermal energy comes as Hochul, who is up for reelection in November, is trying to slow down the state's climate goals, citing the cost and need for more time. The issue is a major sticking point in budget negotiations as Democrats in the legislature say they don't want to change the timeline. All 213 seats in the legislature also are up for election in November.

The 2019 climate law requires the state to get all of its electricity from emission-free sources by 2040 and reduce economywide emissions by 85% from 1990 levels by 2050.

Environmental advocates, unions and university leaders say thermal energy networks are a way to help the state

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meet its goals. SUNY's 64-campus system includes about 110 million square feet statewide, equating to about 40% of the state-owned building footprint.

"SUNY campuses utilizing geothermal heat pumps are leading the way to improve energy efficiency, reduce emissions, and help the entire state meet our climate sustainability goals," SUNY Chancellor John B. King Jr. said in an emailed statement. "Investing in SUNY capital projects are win-win-wins for New York: for our students, for job creation, and for our environment."Existing geothermal

Last year's budget included \$200 million through what's known as the Sustainable Future Fund for thermal energy networks, including \$22 million for Stony Brook.

Twenty-three SUNY schools, including Stony Brook, Farmingdale and Old Westbury, already have some geothermal, according to SUNY. The more individual geothermal systems are connected to the campus network, the more efficient it is, Considine said. "A lot of these campuses, their existing heating systems are at the ends of their natural life . . . how we replace them kind of presents this opportunity," she said.

William Herrmann, Stony Brook's vice president for facilities and services and chief sustainability officer, in an email said they're optimistic the funds will be included in the budget.

"Scaling these systems is key to lowering emissions, improving energy performance, and advancing a cleaner, more resilient New York," he said.

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