

Massachusetts just passed a massive climate and clean energy bill

In a first for the state, the legislation contains a provision that would allow some cities and towns to ban fossil fuel infrastructure in new and major construction projects

By [Allyson Chiu](#)

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Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker (R) on Thursday signed a major climate and clean-energy bill that contains sweeping policies targeting renewables, transportation and fossil fuels — a move that lawmakers and advocates say is critical to supporting the state’s goal to [reach net-zero emissions by 2050](#).

Baker’s decision to sign the bill, which was approved by the state legislature July 31, comes as Congress is poised to pass its most significant piece of climate legislation, the [Inflation Reduction Act](#).

Described as a “[landmark bill](#),” the Massachusetts climate legislation notably includes a provision — the first of its kind for the state — that would allow 10 municipalities to legally ban fossil fuel infrastructure in new and major construction projects. With this policy, certain cities and towns in Massachusetts could soon join others across the country that have taken similar steps to change local building codes to block the use of fossil fuels, such as natural gas — meaning many people who want gas stoves or furnaces are probably out of luck in these places.

The bill also has a slew of other climate-friendly policies, including: funding for offshore wind energy and electricity grid improvements, a ban prohibiting car dealerships from selling new gas- or diesel-powered vehicles after 2035, incentives for electric vehicles and appliances, and additional provisions focused on natural gas.

“Addressing climate change requires bold, urgent action,” Baker [tweeted](#) Thursday after signing the bill. “I am proud to have supported the Commonwealth’s leadership on these critical issues to preserve our climate and our communities for future generations.”

But the road to Thursday’s signing hasn’t been entirely smooth.

Although Baker largely left the legislation intact after state lawmakers first sent the bill to his desk in July, he responded with a 19-page document outlining preferred amendments, [WBUR reported](#). An amended version of the bill that included some of Baker’s suggestions was sent back to him July 31. It, however, still contained the provision to allow 10 towns and cities to ban fossil fuels hookups, provided that they meet Massachusetts’ 10 percent affordable-housing target — a major source of concern for Baker, who said he views the policy as a kind of “[exclusionary zoning](#),” [CommonWealth Magazine reported](#).

“That part of the bill gives me agita.” the governor said during a news conference Tuesday, according to

Commonwealth. “One of the big decisions we have to make is whether my concerns about that particular piece, which cuts at something I think anybody would agree is a very significant problem in Massachusetts, overwhelm the rest of the good the bill does.”

In an interview with the Boston Globe on Thursday, Baker said he decided to sign largely because of other aspects of the bill, including specifics about the offshore wind policies and its efforts to advance clean energy.

“Since taking office in 2015, we have worked hard to ensure [Massachusetts] is a national leader in combating climate change,” Baker tweeted. “Today, I signed a climate bill into law that will further support our administration’s wide-ranging efforts.”

Supporters of the legislation cheered Thursday’s development.

“It’s a great day for Massachusetts,” tweeted state Rep. Jeffrey N. Roy (D), who, along with state Sen. Mike Barrett (D) and others, helped move the bill through the legislature.

Ben Hellerstein, state director for Environment Massachusetts, called the bill “a big deal.”

“With this bill becoming law, leaders in Massachusetts of all political stripes are showing that states can take meaningful climate action,” Hellerstein said in a statement. “This bill gives me hope that we can work together to build a future where all of us can thrive. I’m thrilled for our Commonwealth to play a key role in building a world powered by 100% clean energy.”

Amid the celebratory statements, some advocates also pointedly defended the inclusion of the fossil fuel provision.

“Contrary to the Governor’s misimpression, the ten town provision is a pro-housing provision — construction and operational costs of all-electric buildings are on par with or lower than the costs of fossil fueled buildings,” Lisa Cunningham, architect and co-founder of ZeroCarbonMA, a local group that has been championing a fossil fuel ban policy for several years, said in a statement. “This bill ensures that multi-family housing is fossil-fuel free, and that healthy and safe buildings are accessible to ALL residents in our communities, not just wealthy residents.”

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