HOUSE BILL 720

Short Title:	State Clean Energy Goal for 2050.	(Public)
Sponsors:	Representatives Autry, Harrison, Prather, and von Haefen (Primary Sponsors). *For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.*	
Referred to:	Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House	

April 19, 2023

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A STATE GOAL OF ONE HUNDRED PERCENT CLEAN ENERGY BY 2050 AND TO PROMOTE THE CREATION OF GREEN JOBS.

Whereas, since 1880, climate change has increased the global average surface temperature by 1.1 degree Celsius (1.9 degrees Fahrenheit); and

Whereas, climate change is expected to increasingly impact North Carolina's temperatures, precipitation, and sea level with harmful consequences in coming years; and

Whereas, climate change and global average temperature increases are primarily due to human-caused fossil fuels emissions, including coal, oil, and natural gas, according to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, National Academy of Sciences, American Meteorological Society, United States Environmental Protection Agency, United States Department of Defense, and numerous other leading scientific, academic, and governmental authorities both in the United States and internationally; and

Whereas, a final agreement of the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP21), including the United States and a total of 195 nations, was reached in Paris, France, on December 12, 2015, entered into force on November 4, 2016, and stated the aim to "hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels"; and

Whereas, scientists have concluded the concentration of carbon dioxide, one of the primary greenhouse gasses driving climate change, is currently at about 420 parts per million and continues to rise and will likely stay above this level for the indefinite future for the first time in millions of years; and

Whereas, the past eight years have been the hottest years on record, and the years 2016 and 2020 are tied as the hottest ever recorded; and

Whereas, an increase in the global average temperature, if not stopped, will have major adverse impacts on both the natural and human-made environments due to longer, more intense heat waves, prolonged droughts, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and more intense and frequent extreme weather events; and

Whereas, these physical effects are expected to lead to water scarcity, food insecurity, increasing numbers of refugees, increased poverty, and mass extinctions of species; and

Whereas, according to a report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, natural disasters cost the country at least $165 billion in 2022 due to 184 different weather and climate disasters, ranging from hurricanes to wildfires to winter storms; and

Whereas, in 2018, Hurricane Florence devastated North Carolina, with over 40 confirmed fatalities and damage across the State approaching an estimated $17 billion; and

Whereas, climate models predict that the country can expect more of these catastrophic and costly events over time; and

Whereas, studies completed by Stanford University, the Brookings Institution, the United Nations, and others point to the severe economic costs of climate change and continuing use of fossil fuels, estimating billions of dollars a year in costs nationally and trillions globally; and

Whereas, leading economists, policy experts, and business leaders conclude that transitioning to a clean energy economy available for all would create millions of green jobs nationally, improve our living standards, and boost economic growth in coming years; and

Whereas, climate change and the continuing use of fossil fuels disproportionately impact communities of color and low-income communities in North Carolina and throughout the United States, and specifically (i) climate hazards, such as increased flooding, extreme heat, and poor air quality, disproportionately harm minority, low-income, and politically marginalized communities, (ii) communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately exposed to fossil fuel pollution that causes cancer, asthma, and other serious health problems, and (iii) oil refineries, natural gas facilities, and the dirtiest coal-fired power plants, which produce coal ash, are disproportionately located in communities of color; and

Whereas, recent studies conclude that the United States could achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors by the year 2050, and specifically the nation's energy sector could achieve 80% clean electricity by 2030 and 100% clean electricity by 2035, while creating numerous green jobs; and

Whereas, municipalities, organizations, businesses, and academic institutions throughout the world have set a goal to achieve carbon or climate neutrality by 2050 or earlier; and

Whereas, over 450 American colleges and universities have made a commitment to reduce greenhouse gases, including Appalachian State University, Catawba College, Davidson College, Duke University, Fayetteville State University, Guilford College, North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Wake Technical Community College, and Warren Wilson College; and

Whereas, North Carolina is poised to create numerous clean jobs, advance economic growth, and address climate change through the use of solar and wind energy, given that the state (i) ranks fourth in the nation in installed solar capacity, exceeding 8,147 megawatts, (ii) has enough installed solar capacity to power nearly 956,000 homes, (iii) has a solar market valued at $11 billion, with nearly $1 billion invested in 2021, (iv) has more than 240 solar companies at work throughout the value chain, as well as nearly 7,000 solar jobs, and (v) has more offshore wind energy potential than any Atlantic state; and

Whereas, since solar photovoltaic system prices in the United States have dropped by more than 60% over the past decade; and

Whereas, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report recommends a global goal of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the early 2050s, which is necessary to stabilize the global average temperature to avoid climate catastrophe; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Article 7 of Chapter 62 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"**§ 62-133.10A. One hundred percent clean energy goal for North Carolina by 2050.**

In order to avoid climate catastrophe, to promote job creation and economic growth, and to protect the Earth for current and future generations, it shall be the goal of the State that one hundred percent (100%) of the total retail sales of electricity in North Carolina shall be generated from renewable energy resources by December 31, 2050. The State Energy Office, in consultation with the Commission and the Public Staff, shall develop a plan to achieve this goal

and shall submit the plan to the 2024 Regular Session of the 2023 General Assembly upon its convening."

SECTION 2. This act is effective when it becomes law.