ALBANY — SUNY Chancellor Kristina Johnson is looking to hasten plans to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the State University system.

“I don’t think we can wait because ... people aren’t going to do it in certain states so we’ve got to make up for that,” Johnson told POLITICO.

The new chancellor has presented a number of energy efficiency plans in her 2018-19 state budget recommendations, proposing to make buildings more energy efficient, using SUNY campuses as regional microgrids and eventually reducing emissions by more than 40 percent.

The proposals reflect Johnson’s background working as an engineer, entrepreneur, inventor and former official with the Department of Energy. They also align with Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s energy agenda and would help make SUNY, the nation’s largest comprehensive state university system, a leader in higher ed energy efficiency.

Cuomo, who is positioning himself for a potential 2020 presidential run, has been burnishing his national environmental credentials with plans to reduce emissions 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2030 and get 50 percent of electricity from renewables by 2030.

“I think the combination of the chancellor’s emphasis and the governor’s interest will bode well for New York in the future in terms of green energy, renewable energy,” said Fred Kowal, president of United University Professions, the union that represents SUNY employees. “But because of the size of SUNY as the biggest system, it would clearly make New York a leader by moving forward with this. I think it would position the governor as a leader on these issues and ... [continue] his program of utilizing SUNY to be a crucial component in the transformation of New York state’s economy.”

Here’s a breakdown on three of Johnson’s key energy proposals:

**Energy efficiency**
SUNY, along with all state agencies, must adhere to Executive Order 88, which
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requires the reduction of source energy use intensity to 20 percent by 2020, from a base of 2010.

SUNY has been working with the New York Power Authority to reduce its overall EUI, and the current reduction is about 6 percent, according to SUNY.

With 60 percent of SUNY’s energy use attributed to the buildings — going toward everything from heating to cooling to electricity — making them more efficient will help reduce emissions and costs, Johnson said.

Her capital budget request includes $800 million to address critical maintenance issues, using energy-efficient materials, retrofits and strategies while replacing outdated infrastructure.

There are approximately 2,800 buildings — 2,346 of which are state-operated, including academic buildings, hospitals and residence halls.

“We have this enormous old installed infrastructure. We’re going to have to repair it, so why not get those long-term energy savings at the same time?” Johnson said.

Many campuses have developed energy master plans, and new construction, both through the State University Construction Fund and the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York, meets LEED silver requirements as a minimum, though frequently meets gold and platinum standards, according to SUNY.

SUNY, collaborating with NYPA’s New York Energy Manager platform, is working to implement real-time monitoring to keep buildings operating at peak efficiency, according to SUNY.

Johnson’s plan to make all buildings as efficient as possible takes to scale systemwide projects such as one completed in November at Stony Brook University. Through upgrades, including those to heating and cooling systems, the campus will save more than $832,000 in annual energy costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 3,800 tons a year.

Emissions

Cuomo has leveraged state agencies, including SUNY, to contribute toward his overall goal of reducing emissions by 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2030.

As a result, SUNY has reduced its annual greenhouse gas emissions, going from about a million tons of carbon dioxide equivalents per year in 1990 to 750,000 tons in 2017, with an increased footprint of 38 million gross square feet, according to SUNY.

The system is on its way to meeting the 30 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020 with plans to reach 40 percent by 2030, in line with state goals.

“We believe we can take that 750,000 [tons] down to 300,000 [tons] — maybe even less, 250,000,” Johnson said. “We’re looking at a program over a decade. We can do some of that by sourcing clean electricity with storage.”

Currently about 400,000 of the 750,000 tons are due to electricity use, she said.

The system is looking at sourcing clean electricity, locking in prices, which are low right now, for long-term contracts, she said. “It’s all about, how do we think thoughtfully about what we’re doing today and the impact it’s going to have on tomorrow?” she said.

Microgrid

Johnson also plans to utilize the locations of the 64 campuses statewide to create microgrids.

Her capital budget proposal includes $80 million to support energy-saving retrofits and the development of microgrids at select campuses to reduce energy costs.

Local microgrids increase the resiliency of the electricity system in areas where they are located by utilizing on-site generation, storage and other tools. Cuomo has pushed microgrids as a key part of his transformation of the energy system.

If there is another Superstorm Sandy, the state could utilize energy from SUNY through the microgrids, Johnson said: “You want to have sort of these regional microgrids … so that there’s a place where people can go to continue and live during the recovery part.”

The idea is to build up these communities of resiliency throughout the system, since the campuses already are in different regions statewide, she said.

The microgrids would be built up at strategic campuses based on their location regionally, though Johnson has not yet released which campuses will be selected.

Marie French contributed to this report.