

Tri-City Herald

Vote on divisive Ohio energy bill delayed again

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COLUMBUS, OHIO — A proposal to adjust Ohio's renewable [energy](#) and efficiency mandates stalled for a second time on Wednesday amid opposition from environmental and consumer interests and some majority Republican lawmakers.

Senate Public Utilities Chairman Bill Seitz, who sponsored the measure, cancelled a scheduled committee vote Wednesday, signaling an uncertain fate for the sweeping bill.

"This decision reflects nothing more than my adherence to the principle that it is more important to get this complex subject done right than to get it done quickly," he said in a statement.

Seitz, a Cincinnati Republican, had made significant revisions to the bill after it stalled before Thanksgiving in hopes of lining up needed committee support. That included removing a provision that would have allowed power companies to opt out of meeting some state [alternative energy](#) requirements.

But opponents continued to balk.

State and national advocacy groups struck out against the measure, saying it would harm Ohio's budding renewables industry, hike electricity bills for Ohio residents and businesses and favor politically generous utility executives over average consumers.

The Union of Concerned Scientists submitted a petition to Seitz on Monday questioning the goals of the legislation.

"[Renewable energy generation](#) in the Buckeye State has nearly tripled since 2008, and Ohioans are benefiting from downward pressure on [wholesale electricity prices](#) and reduced pollution," the group wrote.

"Energy efficiency programs have reduced energy demand by billions of kilowatt-hours and saved consumers millions of dollars. Ohio is now home to thousands of clean energy jobs thanks

to the investments energy efficiency, solar, and wind companies have made in our communities," they told Seitz.

Meanwhile, the liberal think tank Innovation Ohio released a campaign finance analysis showing Ohio's four major electric utilities have contributed nearly \$2.7 million to gubernatorial and legislative candidates and statewide political parties in Ohio since May 2008. More than half of that went to current members of the Legislature, the review found.

"The utilities, armed with a mountain of cash and an army of lobbyists, have spent five years giving generously to the very people who could enact a change in the law that would benefit their bottom lines while costing Ohioans more on their electricity bills and jeopardize jobs in the state's emerging energy sector," the report said.

Seitz's bill revisited a 2008 Ohio law under which utilities were required to produce 12.5 percent of their energy from renewable sources, such as wind, solar and hydropower, by 2025. Another 12.5 percent must come from so-called "advanced energy," such as clean coal or a state-of-the-art nuclear reactor, in what's been called the "25 by '25" standard.

Seitz argues that Ohio's in-state renewables mandates — which he labels "envirosocialist" — need to be addressed before they risk being declared unconstitutional, as similar rules have been elsewhere in the U.S.

He said Wednesday he will proceed on the issue along three paths: pursuing a compromise on the sidelined bill; holding extensive hearings on separate legislation that would completely wipe out the 2008 mandates; and mapping a legal strategy through meetings with interested parties aimed at "judicial invalidation" of Ohio's mandates.

"Approximately half the states that have renewable portfolio standard mandates have mandates that are less costly and less ambitious than Ohio's," Seitz said. "In most cases, those states' mandates do not include unconstitutional and uneconomic requirements that renewable power emanate from sources located in that state, to the exclusion of cheaper sources from elsewhere in the United States."

It was not clear whether Gov. John Kasich, a fellow Republican, would go along with wiping out the mandates.

The company Enerfab has scheduled a ribbon-cutting event in Seitz's hometown Thursday to tout an energy initiative backed by Kasich that could be jeopardized by the sidelined renewables legislation.

The Kasich-backed law, which took effect in September 2012, bolstered market opportunities for energy-efficient combined heat and power systems by providing incentives paid for through

Ohio electric utilities' energy efficiency rebates. The governor's energy adviser is expected at the event.

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