

State legislation to boost renewable energy paying off for Massachusetts

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TAUNTON — Renewable energy in the commonwealth has skyrocketed since 2007. And in 2011, the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy declared Massachusetts the most energy-efficient state in the country. California had held the honor since 2006.

“Today, we have created some 65,000 private sector jobs in the renewable energy industry, and close to 5,000 companies have started here in Massachusetts in the renewable energy sector,” said state Sen. Marc Pacheco, D-Taunton.

Pacheco serves as the chairman of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, and the Senate Committee on Global Warming and Climate Change. He is also the vice-chairman of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy. All three of the committees have jurisdiction over renewable energy in the state.

“We’ve had a tremendous amount of success in the commonwealth to the point where we are looked at as the nation’s leader in renewable energy and energy efficiency,” Pacheco said. “So we’re greening up the bottom line — that’s the way I like to put it.”

Market for going green

Three of the major sources of renewable energy in Massachusetts are hydroelectricity, wind turbines and, particularly prevalent in the state, solar photovoltaics — or solar panels.

While the first solar panels were installed in Massachusetts more than 30 years ago, according to the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, the push toward renewable energy in the state loosely began with the Electric Utility Restructuring Act of 1997, which established renewable energy credits. In the past decade, legislation has been passed to help expand the renewable energy market and create incentives for residents and businesses to purchase renewable energy.

“Massachusetts embarked upon a program of putting together a sweep of legislation, so we have governor policies that were adopted by the Legislature,” said Pacheco, who added that the main issues renewable energy addresses are national security, the environment, economic development and consumer savings.

“The more we can diversify and come up with more alternatives, the better we’re going to be,” Pacheco said.

In 2007, Gov. Deval Patrick set a goal for the state to reach 250 megawatts of solar power capacity by 2017. And in 2009, he set a goal of reaching 2,000 megawatts of wind-power capacity by 2020. One megawatt equals 1,000 kilowatts.

MassCEC states on its website that, as of July 1, 2012, the state has a total solar capacity of 118 megawatts and wind capacity of 61 megawatts — both of which have jumped dramatically since 2007.

One of the major pieces of legislation that helped spur the growth of renewable energy was the wide-ranging Green Communities Act of 2008, which provided a number of reforms and incentives to promote investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Renewable energy in Massachusetts climbed even more dramatically after 2008.

State and federal incentives

One of the major incentives the state has launched is the use of renewable energy credits, which allow the owners of renewable-energy equipment to sell their credits in an auctionlike market based upon the amount of electricity they produce.

Solar renewable energy credits are issued for every megawatt of solar electricity produced, and the owners of solar equipment can sell their solar credits to electricity providers. According to standards set by the Electric Utility Restructuring Act of 1997, 15 percent of the electricity produced by providers must come from renewable sources by the end of 2020, and providers buy solar credits to help reach this standard.

Other incentives include a federal investment tax credit, which ranges from 10 to 30 percent of the project cost depending on the technology; the Massachusetts personal income tax credit, worth 15 percent of the project cost or \$1,000, whichever amount is lower; Commonwealth Solar II, a MassCEC rebate that can provide up to \$2,000 for solar equipment depending on the amount of electricity produced; and many other MassCEC rebate programs for other renewable energy assets.

Another major incentive is net metering, established with the Green Communities Act of 2008. With net metering, if at any time the owner of renewable energy equipment is producing more electricity than what is being used, the extra electricity goes back onto the electric grid, and the owner receives a credit for this electricity on their electric bill.

“Basically, if you make more power than you’re using, your electric bill will get a credit for the extra power you create,” explained

Dave Pospisil, project coordinator for the Attleboro-based company U.S. Solar Works.

Rehoboth solar panels

The town of Rehoboth recently outfitted its Council on Aging building and Highway Department with a variety of solar equipment through U.S. Solar Works.

“(Massachusetts) has great solar access. It’s a common myth that we don’t have enough sunlight,” Fine said.

According to Fine, solar equipment requires minimal maintenance and has a life span of about 25 years, adding that the equipment can even operate under overcast and in the winter.

“They run perfectly in the winter,” he said. “You get fewer daylight hours, but they actually run better in the cold weather.”

Fine said he became involved in renewable energy because he felt it was the wave of the future.

“Society needs its power from somewhere,” Fine said. “People aren’t slowing down their power consumption, so by switching to solar, you don’t need another power plant.”

Pacheco agreed, comparing the growth in renewable energy to the recent explosion in communication technology that has left many Americans constantly connected through smartphones.

“There’s a lot of opportunity in new technology that’s being created, a lot of new jobs — about 65,000 already — and this is certainly the new wave,” Pacheco said.

Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant

In the Greater Taunton Area, the Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant — which provides electricity to Taunton, Raynham, Berkley, and parts of Dighton and Lakeville — is doing its part to facilitate the growth of renewable energy, with 23.7 percent of its power source in 2011 coming from renewable energy.

“This past year, we finally got to the point where the solar RECs kicked in,” said Mike Horrigan, general manager of the plant. “The incentives are there, and we were able to get some projects that were completed for our customers and brought in renewable energy.”

“Right now, solar is more beneficial to TMLP because of incentives and because of the fact that the sun shines on Taunton equally as other areas,” said Scott Whittemore, energy supply and planning manager of the plant.

The plant currently purchases power from 18 residential projects and plans to purchase power from four additional projects currently under construction. The plant also purchases power from four commercial projects and intends to purchase from seven others still under construction.

The plant also offers its own rebate to residential customers — up to \$5,000 for the installation of solar projects — and it has offered rebates for energy efficient appliances since 2002.

“This is our 10th anniversary,” said Bill Strojny, key accounts representative for the plant. “This program started in July of 2002, and we have given back to our customers \$353,000 for a total of 4,600 appliances.”

The city of Fall River is also keeping pace with the growth of renewable energy. In 2003, the city was home to five solar projects, and in 2011, that number grew to 13, with another 31 in neighboring Somerset and Westport, according to MassCEC.

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If your looking for a GREAT company to install solar panels look up southcoast green light out of Swansea! Their a GREAT company-very reputable and have done hundreds of jobs at really great prices-They did my friends business and its amazing. Very cool-

Dahun

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It makes no sense for the people of Massachusetts to subsidize the world's most expensive and least reliable energy. It is a disgrace that Massachusetts which was a leader in establishing the freest country on the Earth has now become a center for politically corrupt green schemes.

Political supporters raise money for politicians who push legislation subsidizing huge projects which make their supporters millions and force higher taxes and far higher utility bills on the public. This is political corruption advanced to a fine art.

ordinaryaverageguy50

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Pacheco is also leading the way for 'Sustainable Development', which is another way for the state totake away our property rights and make us more dependent on the government. If an individual want to put solar panels on their own home, that's fine. But when the government wants to get involved, run away!

Does everyone remember Evergreen Solar? How'd that work out for us???

THEREAL

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i don't think our taxes should go to this stuff.

Dahun

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If the entire solar and wind ndustry were shut down today this would cause:

- Tens of billions in state and Federal spending saved.
- Zero capacity lost.
- Utilities would no longer be forced to buy power many times more expensive than they can buy on the open market.
- Utilities would not have to supply back-up power plants and keep them idling to support wind and solar farms.
- Utilities would not be forced to pay for power lines to remote areas (such as Berkley) to connect to solar and wind farms
- Utiity rates would be lowered.
- Utilities would no longer have to accept fluctuating power loads from unreliable power sources.
- The air would not be measurably cleaner
- The exact same amount of oil would be used as virtually no power is generated using oil.
- Politicians would lose a stream of money and support from wind and solar developers.
- Developers would not get rich off taxpayer money

Now what exactly does anyone think the advantages are?

taxesrus

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renewable energy is b.s.
if cape wind gets up and running our money will be subsidizing at, and our electric rates will go up.
that is a fact. pacheco and the patrick administration all the way up to obama want to support expensive and unreliable renewables while making fossil fuels more expensive
and legislating the so called green options. this is why our taxes will keep going up and why this country is going down hill.
nuclear energy should be in the discussion. but its not.

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I, of course meant the air would not be measurably more polluted.

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i believe in wind towers just not in the water

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