Kansas Rejects Energy Rules

JOHN MILBURN, Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — A measure to repeal the state's 2009 renewable energy standards for power generation was rejected Wednesday in the Kansas House despite critics who argued the requirements drive up utility bills and unfairly push one industry over another.

The 77-42 vote was one of two procedural votes to reject the measure that was approved 25-15 by the Senate on Tuesday. The bill had the backing of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and small-government groups who oppose government mandates.

The standards require utility companies to provide 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020. They were put in place in 2009 when legislators allowed the construction of a coal-fired power plant in southwest Kansas, as part of a trade-off struck by then-Gov. Mark Parkinson and power plant supporters.
The plant, sought by Sunflower Electric Power Corp., has been stalled by legal and regulatory challenges and is yet to be constructed near an existing plant in Holcomb.

Critics argued Wednesday that the energy standards are unnecessary and lead to higher utility rates, as much as 22 percent across the state since the standards were put in place.

"I support wind energy. What I don't support is the mandate," said Rep. Randy Garber, a Sabetha Republican who made the motion to agree with the Senate repeal. "I support choice, free choice."

Garber said while it may be unclear whether the increased rates were a result of energy requirements or federal mandates was unclear, but like others he wants to let the market determine if wind and other renewables can survive.

Supporters say the standards promote economic growth, in particular in rural and western counties of Kansas.

"This is nothing more than folks who want to exercise political power. This is about wanting to have a win for the sake of having a win without considering the potential benefit all this has," said Rep. Russ Jennings, a Lakin Republican.

Hutchinson area representatives said the energy standards were a factor in several wind energy companies locating in Kansas, including Siemens, which employs several hundred people at its central Kansas plant.

The renewable energy mandate has been targeted by the conservative group

Americans for Prosperity, which has been running television ads attacking the policy since late January and spent $207,000 through February, according to its lobbying reports. Also, the American Legislative Exchange Council has drafted a model policy for states to repeal such mandates, and the Kansas Chamber considers it government picking winners and losers in business.

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