

Gov. Brown signs law requiring 33% of energy be renewable by 2020

The California law increases a previous mandate of 20% renewable energy by 2020. U.S. energy secretary calls the law a model for other states, and an industry group says it could create 100,000 jobs.

Patrick McGreevy, Los Angeles Times, 4-13-11

MILPITAS -- Gov. Jerry Brown on Tuesday signed into law a requirement that California get 33% of its electricity from renewable sources, such as wind and solar energy, by the year 2020.

Calling the law the most ambitious clean-energy effort in the nation, the governor predicted that it would help jump-start the state's economy. He said he expects the aggressive shift away from coal and natural gas to create jobs while putting the state on the cutting edge of new technology.

"It's about California leading the country. It's America potentially leading the world," Brown said at a signing ceremony in Silicon Valley.

The governor spoke at a recently opened SunPower/Flextronics manufacturing plant, a cavernous factory where more than 100 employees make solar panels.

U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu, who attended the ceremony, said he sees the measure as a model for other states. He also announced a tentative commitment of \$1.2 billion in loan guarantees for a solar energy project in San Luis Obispo County that he said would generate enough power for nearly 60,000 homes.

The legislation will make it easier for renewable-energy companies to attract investors for green energy firms, said SunPower Chief Executive Thomas Werner. The measure "gives us long-term market visibility," he said.

Bernadette Del Chiaro, a representative of the lobbying group Environment California, called the law a "huge victory" for the environment.

"California can power itself entirely on clean energy resources like wind, geothermal and solar power," she said.

Brown's signature raises the former renewable-energy mandate of 20%. Sen. Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto), author of the legislation, said the 33% benchmark would reduce air pollution and U.S. dependence on unstable foreign sources of oil, while creating more than 100,000 jobs. That number is based on research by the Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies, a trade group representing renewable energy companies, according to Simitian's staff.

"The new law will stimulate the economy and improve the environment, while protecting ratepayers from excessive costs," Simitian said.

His bill was opposed by many Republican lawmakers who predicted that utilities would have to significantly raise electricity rates, leading some firms to move manufacturing jobs out of the state. One state study said that meeting the mandate would cost utilities about 7% more than current levels of coal and natural gas use.

Californians "should brace themselves for utility-bill sticker shock," said state Sen. Bob Dutton (R-Rancho Cucamonga), leader of the Senate's minority caucus.

Simitian noted that his bill, SB 2X, allows the Public Utilities Commission to put a cap on what power companies would have to spend to meet the new standard. And it permits an extension of the 2020 deadline if renewable energy is not sufficiently available.

Brown made the expansion of renewable energy part of his campaign last year. On Tuesday, he seemed to relish the idea that the measure pushed the envelope on public policy.

"I didn't get my name 'Governor Moonbeam' for nothing," he quipped.

Brown also continued barnstorming for his budget proposal Tuesday, asking a friendly audience of business executives to help him round up the handful of Republican votes needed to put a tax measure on the ballot. He wants to renew billions of dollars in sales, income and vehicle levies to help balance the budget and has promised voters the chance to sign off on them.

"We need the legitimacy of a statewide plebiscite," he told more than 500 business leaders at a conference of the Bay Area Council in San Francisco.

The governor said he was seeking to rekindle talks on his proposal with Republicans, after ending negotiations last month when they bogged down in policy disputes.

"Each of the people...has been talking to me privately, so I continue the discussions," he said. "I believe a number of Republicans will come around, but they are not there yet."

Brown said he would review a proposal by some Democratic legislative leaders to increase taxes first and get voters' view afterward. Like the ballot measure the governor wants, tax increases would require some GOP votes.