

Clean energy plan will boost job growth, advocates predict

BY PAUL HUGHES REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

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HARTFORD — A coalition of environmental, labor and religious groups released a plan Monday for achieving Connecticut's long-term goals for reducing carbon dioxide emissions while adding thousands of jobs a year.

The Clean Energy Future plan primarily advocates greatly increasing the use of wind and solar power to hit the official target of reducing greenhouse gases 80 percent below 2001 levels by 2050.

It predicts that this more aggressive move to more renewable energy sources would add 6,700 jobs a year. It anticipates two-thirds of the new jobs will be high-wage construction and manufacturing jobs.

Additionally, the expected switchover to renewables will save on electricity, heating and transportation costs.

The clean energy plan demonstrates that tackling climate change is good environmental, economic and social policy, said John Harranty, a labor leader.

"The report confirms what a lot of us up here believe, which is that transitioning to a clean energy economy, tackling climate change, does not have to spell economic doom and gloom," said state Rep. James M. Albis, D-East Haven, the House chairman of the Environment Committee. "There are significant opportunities in the clean power sector."

Yet, the plan presented Monday falls 6.25 million metric tons short of the 80 percent goal. State policy requires a reduction to 9.25 million tons in 2050. The initiative unveiled Monday gets down to 15.5 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

The plan's authors laid out other options that they assume could more than achieve the additional reductions, including forest growth, fuel cells, combined heat and power technologies, more public transit and improving fuel efficiency in trucks and heavy equipment.

The plan is also premised on a number of other assumptions, including higher rates of solar installation, faster technological progress and lower prices for solar power, and the elimination of

gasoline-powered cars and light trucks by 2050.

The Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs commissioned Synapse Energy Economics Inc. to prepare the plan along with Labor Network for Sustainability.

The roundtable is a coalition of environmental, labor and religious groups. Its partner in the clean energy study includes labor representatives, environmentalists and academics.

The plan released Monday requires a massive build-out of solar and wind power along with other technologies. It also anticipates investments in energy efficiency and reductions in demand for electricity.

By 2050, the plan assumes solar power will be generating 17,000 megawatts of electricity, and wind power will be providing another 4,000 megawatts.

"If you want to get off the fossil fuels, you have to assume something expands rapidly even with a 35-year vision that we've got there. You have to expand something. We think wind and solar are proven," said Frank Ackerman, an economist with Synapse Energy Economics

Another of the assumptions is that advocates of offshore wind development will overcome any opposition to erecting wind turbines in Long Island Sound, where winds are strongest.

"This seems to me a ridiculous view that will have to be overcome along the way," Ackerman said.

He said he did not believe the assumptions that his research team made in developing the plan are overly optimistic.

"You can call it rosy, but we call it what's been happening in the economy lately and projecting," Ackerman said.

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