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California renewable energy gets major boost in new law

April 12, 2011 | 1:18 pm

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Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law Tuesday a mandate that 33% of electricity in California must come from renewable sources by 2020.

Executives at solar, wind and other clean energy companies said the new regulations could help California reclaim its green leadership position [after losing ground to states such as Texas and Iowa](#).

“This is tremendous,” said Mike Hall, chief executive of solar installer Borrego Solar. “A legislative solution provides a lot more clarity and firepower for regulators and proponents.”

Brown, along with U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, signed the bill while helping dedicate a new solar panel manufacturing plant in Milpitas. The facility will produce 75 megawatts a year of panels from SunPower Corp. and is expected to create 100 jobs.

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The new law, known as a renewable portfolio standard, is the most aggressive of any state. Several attempts to introduce a federal version have stalled in a divided and preoccupied Congress.

California had previously required investor-owned utilities such as Southern California Edison, Pacific Gas & Electric and San Diego Gas & Electric to generate 20% of their electricity from clean sources by 2010, with a three-year grace period.

The law signed Tuesday will also apply to municipal utilities such as the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District, which manage about a quarter of the state's electricity load.

Energy activists hope the mandate will lead to even more ambitious requirements.

"California can power itself entirely on clean energy resources," said Bernadette Del Chiaro, clean energy advocate with Environment California. "Mandating that the state generate a third of its electricity from renewable energy is a big down payment toward that ultimate goal."

Executives said they were also looking forward to long-term stability. Government incentives lasting just one or two years at a time have characterized the renewable energy market, [causing boom-bust cycles when they expire](#).

"The RPS requirements allow utilities to plan to meet higher renewable energy standards and orient the market towards meeting those goals," said Russ Kanjorski, a vice president at Abound Solar.

The new mandate also requires utilities to draw some of their power from small local projects based near customers -- known as distributed generation. Often situated on rooftops and parking lots, such installations don't require the long transmission lines necessary for sprawling wind and solar plants in the deserts and mountains.

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Jan Perry said she will introduce legislation this week to launch a pilot program that would put 75 megawatts of solar on rooftops around the city.

Los Angeles could place 300 megawatts on apartment rooftops -- enough to power 30,000 homes -- within the next decade, according to a study Tuesday from the Los Angeles Business Council, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, USC and UCLA. Many panels could be situated in economically disadvantaged areas.

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[Obama's clean-energy goals have industry questioning feasibility](#)

-- Tiffany Hsu

Photo: Solar panels at PG&E's Vaca-Dixon solar energy site near Vacaville, Calif. Credit: Rich Pedroncelli/Associated Press

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I think you are all being short-sighted even if you don't like eco-freaks. This may actually be a practical investment with dividends paid both in cleaner air and lower energy costs. Perhaps you forget the economic spasms Enron put us through or are oblivious to the record gasoline prices you are now paying. "Continue to do the same thing" is perhaps not very shrewd.

California can continue to tie itself into long-term conventional energy contracts or bet that the price of their energy will go up (it will) and that solar/wind/hydroelectric/etc. technology will improve (it will). To be ready for the 21st century with an investment now. Yes it is a wager but our current policy is circling the drain any way you look at it, something must be done.

Besides, if it goes too sour it just takes another law to extend deadlines, alter it (natural gas?) or junk it altogether.

Posted by: Planner | April 12, 2011 at 10:03 PM

It amazes me that with so much information at one's fingertips on the internet, that the "go green" losers in California haven't updated thier same old rhetoric of lies for renewables.

Wind is limited and never reached doubl digits in the energy composure. Solar is expensive and we are still in the middle of a recession despite what the retarded liberal media says.

In the end, the point to be made clear here is that the eco freaks care little for citizens, the poor and reality when it comes to pushing thier agenda. They raise our cost of living to get thier way NOW when we should be making small steps. It took decades to clean up polluted air and water that resulted from the industrialization from the 40's to the 70's.

Peak oil can't be proven, Obama and libs have been putting up road blocks on drilling. Coal isn't anywhere as dirty as it use to be when we had acid rain problems. The lies of the left wing and irresponsible enviromentalist freaks needs to be weighed against the truth rather than old data and lies.

-- Dave Wyman ”

On: Budget rider would lift wolf protections in northern Rockies

“ I have been spending summers in the Teton area of Idaho and Wyoming the last ten years and have seen first hand the numbers of moose shrink. We used ...

-- S Williamson ”

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Posted by: Roger | April 12, 2011 at 08:02 PM

We are witnessing an energy fiasco of unprecedented proportions! This is the way people's money is confiscated by government and your way of life is radically altered. This is the way future debt obligations of residents is created. This is the way certain individuals politically connected also get grossly rich, and you as a citizen all never be aware of the price you've really paid for this energy hysteria. A lot of money is at stake, yours! Enjoy the ride, but don't do away with you fireplace and candles just yet. You may be burning coal , trash, and wood again someday for your basic needs. 50 to 60 cents a Kwh is tough to use much.

Posted by: Old California Veteran | April 12, 2011 at 07:52 PM

This will cost a fortune and push more businesses out of the State further eroding the tax base. Genius.

Posted by: Ironic | April 12, 2011 at 06:37 PM

I also worry about the cost of mandates like this.

The DWP has consistently refused to estimate the effect of clean energy goals on power rates.

To the people who think solar or wind is free, all I can say is you're only looking at part of the equation.

Solar panels have a life of about 20 years. There is also a lot of electronics that take the low voltage DC output of a photovoltaic cell and turn it into 60 cycle 120V current used in the US. Wind turbines are moving parts that require regular maintenance.

So most people calculate the cost of electricity by taking the capital cost plus the maintenance and divide it by the total energy output over the expected life. Most articles I've read put this in the \$18-25 range for 100 KWh versus about \$15 for my current DWP bill. I expect my rates to rise significantly as this is implemented.

Oh yeah and just for comparison Nuclear Power is about \$5 including the lawsuits to get licensed. Coal is comparable to nuclear.

I got my numbers from the Department of Energy website. I didn't make them up, honest.

Posted by: jsa26 | April 12, 2011 at 06:24 PM

States with mandatory feed-in tariffs subsidizing solar energy production have also limited the amount that can be built:

<http://reason.com/archives/2010/01/26/overpaying-for-green>

Solar is diffuse and unreliable. Pretending that passing a law can change the engineering side of this equation is ludicrous. People claiming that this nonsense is "saving our children's future" need to explain how expensive, intermittent energy is a good idea.

I expect that California will take the same path, or rip out the demand altogether, the same as happened with the state's fanciful program to force zero-emission vehicles onto the marketplace by 2014.

Posted by: Rob McMillin | April 12, 2011 at 05:43 PM

We have enough domestic natural gas to run all the power generation we will ever need.

Posted by: James Andrews | April 12, 2011 at 05:42 PM

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just another "idea" being crammed down our throats by someone who clearly doesn't know what he's talking about when it comes to "energy." case in point: this will "create" 100 jobs; well, moonbeam, have you thought about the "hundreds" of jobs that will be lost because of your ignorance and irresponsibility?

Posted by: drdro | April 12, 2011 at 05:31 PM

Say goodbye to thousands more jobs in California!

Posted by: 4th generation Ca native | April 12, 2011 at 05:20 PM

Moonbeam hasn't changed this should make our electric bills triple by 2015 and triple again by 2020. Then come 2021 California will be just like Mexico a big worthless waste land.

Posted by: caseclosed | April 12, 2011 at 05:13 PM

IS THERE A SMART METER AT THE CAPITOL?

Posted by: lastinline | April 12, 2011 at 05:09 PM

Now I definitely won't vote yes for more taxes. Jerry Brown is a dumb Governor. The economy sucks and he does crap like this? He's clueless. We need a recall.

Posted by: Brian | April 12, 2011 at 04:58 PM

On the outskirts of one of China's most polluted cities, an old farmer stares despairingly out across an immense lake of bubbling toxic waste covered in black dust. He remembers it as fields of wheat and corn.

Yan Man Jia Hong is a dedicated Communist. At 74, he still believes in his revolutionary heroes, but he despises the young local officials and entrepreneurs who have let this happen.

'Chairman Mao was a hero and saved us,' he says. 'But these people only care about money. They have destroyed our lives.'

Vast fortunes are being amassed here in Inner Mongolia; the region has more than 90 per cent of the world's legal reserves of rare earth metals, and specifically neodymium, the element needed to make the magnets in the most striking of green energy producers, wind turbines.

Posted by: EnemyOfTheState | April 12, 2011 at 04:46 PM

Very encouraging. You're definitely moving in the right direction--the southland has excellent solar potential.

Posted by: James A. Burt | April 12, 2011 at 04:43 PM

Germany is a leader and is dumping \$20 Billion a year into it. Germany also has electricity rates of 30.66 cent/kWh in 2009 and going up, not down.

They currently produce about 16% of energy from renewables and have a 35% electricity target.

Posted by: SoCal_Bozo | April 12, 2011 at 04:35 PM

Now if we can just get the environmentalists to stop their lawsuits to... halt wind power farms in the mountains... stop a major solar farm in fallow Kern County farmland... kill a renewable energy electrical corridor into San Diego... and on and on. They sue to force renewable energy... then sue to stop it.

Posted by: Michael | April 12, 2011 at 04:22 PM

Judging from this fine, balanced piece of journalism, nobody is opposed to this

Posted by: Victor | April 12, 2011 at 04:21 PM

Renewable energy in the long run is cheaper as it employs resources that do not need to be mined or pumped. The set up is more expensive. Most of these technologies have been in use for decades in any case. In other parts of the world they have also been shown to create jobs and advance technology as distinct from the 19th century approach so favored by so many.

Posted by: GH | April 12, 2011 at 04:16 PM

those who are against this. We're running out of oil. Coal is dirty. What option do we have? Keep putting this off until we're literally out of any source of energy and then think about it?

Posted by: Jeat | April 12, 2011 at 04:12 PM

Say hello to .35 per kilowatt hour electricity, Kalifornia! The only reason the "green industry" is celebrating is that now they can fleece the ratepayers!

Posted by: Exnavyemo | April 12, 2011 at 04:01 PM

I'm all for spending on renewable energy and we need to reduce our carbon footprint now. Things that offer no return on investment such as welfare and educating illegals can wait until we solve this more pressing problem.

Posted by: Lawrence W | April 12, 2011 at 03:55 PM

Not one mention in the piece about how much this pie in the sky energy plan is going to cost you and me. "Alternative energy" is currently way more expensive to produce than coal or nuclear. Of course, liberals don't care how much their schemes cost consumers, they just want to be able to go to their cocktail parties and declare themselves superior to others.

Posted by: mocus11 | April 12, 2011 at 03:49 PM

Where is the budget? THAT, and only that, is the priority.

Posted by: Michael, MPA | April 12, 2011 at 03:49 PM

why? the usa has tons of natural gas, we should burn that up 1st, then use up our coal, and then do solar.

if we don't, we just end up shipping our coal and natural gas to china. it doesn't make sense to just invent weird rules based on the ruling class and their 5 year plans.

they live in a fantasy world.

Posted by: robert gates | April 12, 2011 at 03:47 PM

wow; flower power guy is at it again. green energy jobs cost MULTIPLES of better jobs and energy costs MULTIPLES of coal, nat gas, oil

Posted by: michael | April 12, 2011 at 03:45 PM

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