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REPORT SHOWS SAVINGS, JOBS FROM RENEWABLE POWER

The state would see more jobs, a stronger economy and somewhat lower electric costs if it adopted a renewable portfolio standard that encouraged expansion of wind generation, according to a report Thursday to the Senate Energy Policy and Public Utilities Committee.

If the state required 11 percent renewables by 2020 and 15 percent by 2025, it would see the economy grow by $1.6 billion over the period as well as 19,000 additional jobs, said James Croce, CEO of NextEnergy, the entity created by the state to aid in the commercialization of new energy technology.

The jobs and economic gains fall some, to 17,000 jobs and $1.1 billion gross state product, if the portfolio standard includes energy efficiency measures, Mr. Croce said.

And with increases in both construction and fuel costs, adding 500 megawatts of power to the state would be slightly cheaper using wind power than using coal, said Richard Polich with Energy Options and Solutions, an energy consulting company.

Coal is so far the preferred base load fuel for the state's two major utilities based on their efforts to gain assistance in building at least one new such plant.

Mr. Polich said the cost of coal is already increasing and the means to transport it are already strained. "If we start building the next round of coal plants, that's going to get worse," he said.

Based on those current prices, he said a coal plant would cost ratepayers an average $80.40 per megawatt hour. Wind turbines with a natural gas peaker plant to back them up would cost $76.59 per megawatt hour, he said. "Renewables are very competitive with traditional fuel plants," he said.

He also argued there was sufficient space in the wind "hot spots" around the state for the turbines to meet the state's growing energy needs. He said 10 percent of current power demand could be met with 150 square miles of windfarm, and he said most of that could still be used for agriculture as well. While standard spacing of the turbines is 10 acres, he said the footprint is actually only a quarter of an acre with the rest of the space to keep the turbines from interfering with each other.