

ROMNEY ENERGY PLAN EMPHASIZES INNOVATION

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STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, AUG. 11, 2006....By investing in renewable energy and encouraging conservation, the state can rein in its appetite for fossil fuel consumption, Gov. Mitt Romney said Friday, rolling out a 10-year plan he said could net the state \$575 million, shield ratepayers from federal surcharges, and protect the environment.

The plan relies on wind and biomass power for new energy sources, and reduction measures like pricing techniques that reward consumers for avoiding peak hours of electricity use.

"The alternative is power plants, with additional cost, with additional pollution, with a long permitting process and the potential of higher and higher electric rates in Massachusetts," Romney said during a State House press conference. "This is the option which allows to have the energy we need without higher costs, with cleaner air, by taking control of our own energy needs."

But Romney affirmed his opposition to two initiatives that advocates insist are important energy and environmental policy matters – the regional effort of Northeast states to curb greenhouse gases and the proposal for a wind energy farm in Nantucket Sound.

Warning that the state is at an "energy crossroads," Romney said the state needs to expedite for this fall its decision-making about siting liquefied natural gas facilities. The plan also encourages state government collaboration with the private sector and academia to develop energy technologies.

Coming this fall are billions in new federal surcharges for energy consumption, coinciding with a rising energy demand that Romney's presentation predicted would outpace supply within seven years.

Frank Gorke, an energy advocate at the progressive-leaning Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group, said he'd brought two reaction statements to the press conference and after reviewing the plan briefly, opted to distribute the more favorable.

"This is light years better than what the Bush administration and Congress have done," Gorke said, but tempered his praise by criticizing Romney for opting out of an emissions-reducing Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and opposing the Cape wind farm.

Little of the "Next-Gen" plan requires legislative action, said Secretary of Economic Development Ranch Kimball. New laws would be needed to foster wind turbine development, both in state land statute changes and in expedited permitting measures for commercial development.

Kimball said wind turbine technology lags the state's willingness to invest in deepwater offshore wind power.

Romney opposes the most visible wind power proposal, a 130-turbine development off Cape Cod. Cape Wind is support by environmentalists, but opposed by many Cape residents. But Kimball noted that the administration has supported eight wind energy projects.

"We're going to have to see a lot more wind power," Romney said.

Noting that the "Next-Gen" plan avoids new power plants, the GOP governor said if additional power plants become necessary, the nuclear variety should be considered: "I think our nation is going to have to explore nuclear power sources again."

Acknowledging that his term winds to a close this winter, after which he is expected to pursue a possible White House bid, Romney said much of the plan can be put in motion in the next few months.

Through the "negawatts" technique, under which utilities reward customers for efficiency, and adjusting rates to time of day for small business and residential customers, and real-time pricing for industry, the state's market for energy could thin, the plan supposes.

The Division of Energy Resources is expected to come up this month with a "conservation lottery" through which purchasers of efficiency products could win trips, reimbursements and other prizes, Romney said.

Romney on Thursday vetoed a portion of a renewable energy bill because, he said, the language didn't do enough to encourage new clean-burning facilities in the state. He approved the portion of the bill (H 5090) that seeks to block LNG tankers from traveling within certain limits of infrastructure like bridges, effectively preventing a facility in Fall River, but vetoed a section he said could close a similar station in Everett.

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