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My Turn: Energy moratorium bills are bad for the economy

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Last spring the New Hampshire Senate showed true leadership by defeating a moratorium on renewable energy development, keeping the state on track to meet its clean energy goals and attract valuable economic investment to New Hampshire.

The House will have an opportunity later this month to similarly defeat moratorium bills that would ban certain types of energy projects in our state, including renewable projects. A moratorium would undercut years of efforts by state policy-makers, the business community and environmental organizations, all of whom have worked hard to attract, retain and grow renewable energy business. New Hampshire will benefit if the House follows the Senate's lead and defeats these moratorium bills.

We need to attract new businesses and create jobs in New Hampshire – a moratorium on renewable energy tells entrepreneurs and investors to go elsewhere. It creates uncertainty in the marketplace, keeping businesses from planning and making sound investments. The business uncertainty associated with a moratorium does not allow for the proper planning and sound investment that is inherent in any successful enterprise.

Rather than closing the door to business via a moratorium, last year the Legislature directed the Office of Energy and Planning to analyze and report on New Hampshire's current Site Evaluation Committee process for evaluating new energy investments. The report, issued in December, provides substantial stakeholder and citizen feedback which can now be considered by the Legislature and the Site Evaluation Committee as they contemplate common-sense improvements. These efforts should be given time to be completed.

Policy decisions like a moratorium can have consequences to the state's reputation as a business-friendly place and can directly affect projects that have a major economic benefit for the state.

For example, one of the moratorium bills, HB 580, is directed at new wind energy facilities and could have a direct impact on economic development in New Hampshire. A recent study by Ross Gittell (now chancellor of the Community College System of New Hampshire) and Matthew Magnusson shows that just one 30-megawatt wind project would bring nearly \$56 million in economic development to surrounding cities and towns and create nearly 100 construction jobs and more than a dozen post-construction jobs. Further statewide benefits include hundreds of thousands of dollars paid annually in utility property tax payments that benefit New Hampshire communities and schools, as well as a bevy of other positive economic impacts.

Properly siting energy infrastructure in New Hampshire, protecting our invaluable natural resources and maintaining our commitment to clean and renewable energy are critical to ensuring that New Hampshire remains an attractive place to live, work and invest.

Now is not the time to create business uncertainty in New Hampshire. A moratorium will only serve to undercut the gains that we have made in attracting renewable and clean business development.

The House should heed the advice of the House Science, Technology and Energy Committee, which overwhelmingly voted against the moratorium bills, to prove once again that New Hampshire is serious about its clean energy future. The House should defeat these moratorium bills and maintain the state's ability to realize the economic and environmental benefits of clean, green renewable energy.

(George Bald was commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development for nearly 13 years. During that time, he was also a member of the New Hampshire Site Evaluation Committee.)

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