

LePage Administration Focuses Energy Plan on Lowering Costs and Weatherizing Homes

By MAL LEARY · FEB 5, 2015

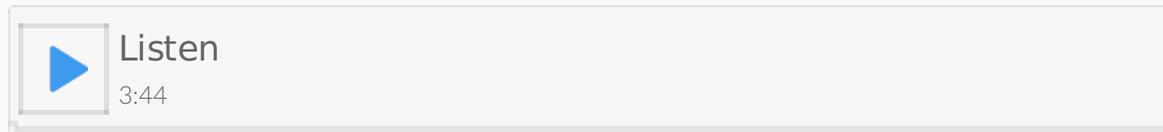
SHARE

Twitter

Facebook

Google+

Email



Mal Leary reports on the LePage administration's energy plan unveiled Thursday.

AUGUSTA, Maine - On yet another cold and snowy day, the LePage administration presented its energy plan for 2015 to a panel of state lawmakers.

It includes provisions aimed at diversifying energy sources, and bringing the state's energy costs more in line with the rest of the nation.



The director of the Governor's Energy Office, Patrick Woodcock, presented the 2015 state energy plan to the Legislature's Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee. The plan builds on past efforts to diversify Maine's energy sources to lower costs, but also concludes that a lot more needs to be addressed to bring Maine's energy costs in line with the rest of the nation.

Just after he was re-elected governor, Paul LePage underscored a major priority of his legislative agenda. "Energy, energy, energy," he said. "It is



Patrick Woodcock, director of the Governor's Energy Office.

CREDIT FILE PHOTO: MAL LEARY / MPBN

going to be the top item going into the Legislature."

Energy Office Director Patrick Woodcock has been working on the state energy

plan since last summer. He says the broad goals of the plan are to lower energy costs, which are among the highest in the nation, and reduce carbon emissions to improve air quality.

And Woodcock told members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee that, for most Mainers, energy is a pocketbook issue. "We all spend money on transportation, getting here today, electric bill,

Difficulty hearing over the phone?
Captioned Telephone (CapTel)[®] allows you to listen while reading captions of what's said.



Maine Relay
DIAL 7-1-1

To learn more about this no-cost* service:
Call 888.269.7477
MERelay.com

*The captioning service is provided at no cost. Equipment and standard long distance charges may apply. CapTel is a registered trademark of Ultratec, Inc. Copyright © 2015 Hamilton Relay. All Rights Reserved.



**Specialized care
for the heart...**

keeping the lights on," he said, "and third is keeping warm in the winter."

On average, that translates to an \$80 a month electric bill, \$250 a month for home heat and \$260 a month for gasoline. That all adds up, he says, in an equation that places Maine first in the nation in how its citizens pay for energy, as a percentage of the state economy.

"Regrettably, we are at the top of the chart as a percentage of our economy that we dedicate to energy," Woodcock said.

Maine's percentage is double the national average and more than three times greater than California, which spends the lowest percentage of its economy for energy. And Woodcock says Maine relies on a somewhat unusual mix of energy sources for its electricity, with more than half the supply coming from renewable sources, such as wind and hydro.

"When you look at Maine's uniqueness in our energy profile, it comes down to we use too much oil to heat our homes inefficiently and our building stock, our lowest-income folks are spending too much to just to get by with their energy bills," he says.

The plan recommends the state do a better job of weatherizing homes of low-income Mainers to reduce their energy consumption, while at the same time shifting them to less costly sources of energy to heat their homes. The plan recommends \$10 million a year be set aside for that effort.

The plan calls for more use of natural gas in Maine, both for heating and for power generation. But Woodcock acknowledges that Maine can't act alone to increase natural gas capacity.

"A lot of these challenges, these electric bills that are driving out our businesses - it comes down to what are our regional energy markets, what's Massachusetts, what's Connecticut doing? We really have to have

a plan regionally," he says.

Woodcock says that, earlier this week, the New England governors discussed the possibilities of a regional approach to handling both natural gas pipelines and electricity transmission facilities. Federal energy laws governing both areas will complicate that effort, says Woodcock, so he says policy discussions will have to include both federal agencies and Congress.

Legislation to implement dozens of specific recommendations has not yet been submitted.

RELATED PROGRAM: MAINE THINGS CONSIDERED

TAGS: ENERGY PLAN, PATRICK WOODCOCK, MPBN

© 2015 Maine Public Broadcasting