

## Going Green in Massachusetts

Conroy: Going green in Massachusetts

By Tom Conroy/Guest Column

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The green movement is on the upswing across the country, with energy efficiency, "green" building, and clean energy ideas being discussed in venues everywhere. This is one bandwagon that we should all jump on. The movement addresses the "Tragedy of the Commons" by providing all of us an opportunity to protect the common good.

Here in Massachusetts, a legislative green movement has been led by House Speaker Sal DiMasi, who outlined his goals for a clean energy and environment initiative last December. He deputized Brian Dempsey, co-chair of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy to work with him and Governor Patrick's team to iron out a bill. Last month, the Massachusetts House of Representative voted in favor of that bill, and the Senate is expected to pass it early next year. The initiative is yet another example of Massachusetts forging ahead of other states on a major public policy issue. Highlights of the bill include:

### 1. Goals for energy efficiency in the Commonwealth by 2020:

20 percent of the Commonwealth's electricity demand in 2020 must be supplied by clean and renewable energy sources;

Reduce by 10 percent the use of fossil fuels in buildings through energy efficiency measures;

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent from 1990 levels by the year 2020.

### 2. Public sector accountability for energy efficiency leadership:

The state must replace gas guzzling public vehicles with more energy efficient cars and trucks.

The state will provide loans and grants for towns to finance the cost of energy efficient improvements to town buildings;

### 3. Promoting the development of clean renewable energy:

Encourages - through tax incentives, penalties, and long-term contracts - electricity distributors to purchase clean, renewable energy sources of power.

For consumers like you and me, what will this bill mean for each of us, if it becomes law?

The bill will allow consumers participating in pilot programs to track and become aware of their personal energy consumption. A "Smart Grid" pilot program will utilize "Smart Meter" technology to operate an integrated grid network communication system in a limited geographic area. Customers will be able to monitor and adjust their own energy usage in order to make more efficient choices regarding energy use. The objective is for each customer who participates to reduce peak loads by a minimum of 5percent .

Provides tax incentives and loans to individuals to purchase and install energy saving technology:

The alternative vehicles tax deduction offers \$2,000 in savings for an individual who purchases a hybrid or alternative fuel vehicle;

The "Pay and Save" pilot program allows customers to purchase and install renewable energy products in their

residences by paying the cost of the system over time through an additional charge on their electricity bill;

The "HEAT Loan" pilot program will assist consumers with the purchase of energy efficient items for residential home modifications.

The Massachusetts Green Communities Act of 2007, as the bill is called, is being mirrored by what the U.S. House of Representatives is doing at the federal level. I recently met with newly elected Congresswoman Niki Tsongas, who described HR 6, the bill the US House passed last week. The federal bill seeks to promote US energy independence, sets energy consumption reduction goals, establishes energy efficiency standards for autos, promotes clean and renewable energy production, prevents oil price gouging, and creates options for capturing and storing greenhouse gases.

Some of us would like to see the federal government go farther: setting a 35 miles per gallon standard for autos by the year 2020 promotes a glacial pace of change. Indeed, the glaciers may be receding faster than that standard rises. Nevertheless, the federal initiative is part of the momentum of the green movement, and like the Massachusetts bill, has many positive elements. Let's continue to go green by ensuring US Senate and Massachusetts Senate passage of these bills. And once these two bills are passed, let's focus on using these new laws to reach and then surpass the goals they set well before 2020.

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