



Our View: Coal phase-out bill gives lawmakers a choice

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Clean-energy advocates have long argued that coal-fired power plants should be phased out, and public opinion is increasingly on their side. Now a coalition of Oregon's two largest power companies and environmental groups has settled on a plan to eliminate coal power from the state's energy grid by 2030 and produce half the state's electricity from clean, renewable sources by 2040.

A bill to transition away from coal failed to pass in the 2015 legislative session, and advocates launched three initiative petition drives intended to place a measure on the November 2016 ballot. Pacific Power and Portland General Electric took the if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em approach and drew up a compromise bill the utilities say achieves the same result but gives them more flexibility and will cost a great deal less. The environmental groups have agreed that if the bill passes, they will drop the ballot measure campaign.

House Bill 4036 seeks to take advantage of a recent move by Congress that extends a 30-percent tax credit for renewable energy projects that start within five years. Utility officials say that discount, along with the declining cost of renewable power in general, means the cost to ratepayers should be negligible.

PGE and Pacific Power provide 70 percent of the power in Oregon. Pacific Power is the primary provider in this part of the state.

PGE operates the only coal-fired plant in Oregon, at Boardman. That plant is already on its way out by 2020, but this bill would stop the purchase of power generated from coal in Wyoming and other places as well. That wouldn't stop those plants from operating, but their days are numbered. **Coal power will get steadily more expensive as federal restrictions increase.**

As is the case with several bills in the 2016 Legislature, HB 4036 is intended to head off ballot initiatives that would be more heavy-handed. Backers say this bill will cost \$600 million less than the initiative. Pacific Power estimates rate increases as a result of the bill would be less than 1 percent annually through 2030.

At least one public opinion survey indicates strong support for HB 4036. It is complex legislation for a 35-day short session, but the gamble for lawmakers is that if it doesn't pass, the ballot measure might, resulting in higher costs. And lawmakers can adjust legislation in the committee process, while ballot measures are an up-or-down proposition.

Coal is clearly on its way out as a source of electric power. Lawmakers can take control of the phase-out process or leave it up to voters and the marketplace.

Editorial Boards in Favor Of HB 4036:



Portland Tribune

The Register-Guard

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