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Senate committee approves energy bills backed by utilities

By [Amy Lane](#)

A state Senate committee on Thursday approved energy legislation that, among other things, sets new requirements for use of renewable energy and restricts electricity customers' ability to choose alternate suppliers.

The bills approved by the Senate Energy Policy and Public Utilities Committee now go to the full Senate.

Hailing the Thursday action was the **Michigan Jobs and Energy Coalition**, which supported the House-passed package and said it would provide affordable electricity and a structure to encourage development of new plants.

Michigan's two largest energy companies – **DTE Energy Co.** and **CMS Energy Corp.** – have been major supporters of the bills, which include measures to establish a new approval process for power plants and utility rates, and eliminate businesses' current subsidy of residential rates.

One bill also requires that electricity providers obtain at least 10 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2015.

The coalition said that the bills overall "will ensure a balanced power portfolio, including renewable energy sources, to meet Michigan's growing power needs."

But legislation also includes a 10 percent limit on the amount of a utility's customers that can go to alternate suppliers. And a spokesman for an opposing group, the **Customer Choice Coalition**, said that 10 percent "means zero," in terms of competition.

"No company will come into Michigan to compete for 10 percent of the market," said the coalition's Dave Waymire.

"We continue to say our current system has worked well to hold down rates and increase generation and reliability. We don't understand any need to move these bills, and these mean giant rate hikes for Michigan customers, especially residential customers," Waymire said.

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