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Granholm, DeVos enthusiastic about alternative energies

Kathy Barks Hoffman / Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. -- Republican Dick DeVos says Michigan's electric rates are too high, while Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm says they're competitive and better than in many other industrial states.

Aside from that disagreement, however, both want to see the state move toward more energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy, such as wind and solar power.

Not only will those reduce Michigan's reliance on sources of fuel from other states and countries -- the coal, oil, uranium and natural gas used to run the state's power plants -- but it will add jobs, they say.

To that end, DeVos says he'll study unique and innovative wind turbine and solar power projects across the country to see which could be models for additional renewable energy production in Michigan.

"What we're seeing is these options have become very viable, and that the cost of installing solar power and the productivity from it is encouraging technology," he told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

Granholm has made increasing the amount of renewable energy in the state a top consideration as state regulators prepare a report on Michigan's future energy needs and how they can best be fulfilled.

"Michigan has the capacity to become America's alternative energy development epicenter, and that offers a tremendous opportunity to diversify our economy and provide high-wage, high-tech 21st century jobs to our residents," she says.

"It is our duty to find a way to increase Michigan's energy independence and, in the process, develop affordable, efficient, safe and environmentally friendly electric sources powered by Michigan's businesses, Michigan's innovation and Michigan workers."

The state still is in the early stages of developing renewable energy.

Only three wind turbines exist so far -- one in Traverse City owned by the municipal utility there, and two near Mackinaw City owned by a private company. Consumers Energy Co. in Jackson buys some of the renewable energy it offers customers for a slightly higher price from the Mackinaw City turbines.

A wind energy park of 32 turbines is being developed by Noble Environmental Power in Huron County in Michigan's Thumb. The company expects to lease land from farmers on which to build the turbines and to sell the power to Consumers Energy.

Solar power is pretty much in its infancy, but the state is starting to attract companies that can manufacture products that can create electricity from the sun.

One example is United Solar Ovonic LLC, which plans to open at least one new manufacturing facility and possibly as many as five in Greenville to make solar cells and flexible solar panels. At least 200 people will work at the first plant, and employment could grow to 1,000 if the others are built. The company also has a

plant in Auburn Hills.

Another is Hemlock Semiconductor, the world's leading producer of polycrystalline silicon used in the production of solar cells. The company has begun construction of a \$400 million to \$500 million expansion at its headquarters in Hemlock.

"There is explosive growth in the demand for this new solar power technology," Granholm says. "That's an opportunity for us."

DeVos says energy conservation also should play a part in meeting Michigan's energy needs. He notes that many people have begun buying electronic thermostats and making other changes to cope with rising energy prices.

"I certainly see the current cost of energy is driving conservation," he says, adding that his family often car pools to save gasoline.

Granholm says she has installed timers on the lights in her daughters' bedroom closets to save energy and has posted signs reminding them to turn out the lights in other parts of the house.

"I tell my children, 'Turn out a light and save a fish,' because of the mercury emissions that fall in the lakes because of our over-reliance on coal-fired power plants," she says.

She notes that the two state-owned cars she uses are both energy friendly. The Chevrolet Suburban is an E85 vehicle, which can run on gasoline and fuel blends of up to 85 percent ethanol. And the Ford Escape is a hybrid that runs both on gasoline and electricity.

Granholm says she has taken her children to see "An Inconvenient Truth," the documentary in which former Vice President Al Gore talks about the dangers of global warming.

DeVos has not seen the documentary, according to campaign spokesman John Truscott.

"He has not had time for many movies lately," Truscott says.

On the Net:

DeVos campaign: <http://www.devosforgovernor.com>

Granholm campaign: <http://www.granholmforgov.com>

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