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Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

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EDITORIALS

More electric power needed, but not at taxpayer expense

State's focus should be on streamlining regulations

Michigan's utility regulators are smart to examine how the state will meet its electricity needs in the near future. The state's infrastructure is aging badly and consumers' voracious consumption of energy continues to strain the system.

However, saddling taxpayers with the cost of building a new plant or asking them to pay to expand existing facilities is the wrong way to fix the system. David Joos, chief executive of Consumers Energy, suggested to Detroit News reporters that "having the state provide up-front financing (for a new power plant) may be the way to go."

And alternative energy suppliers, represented by attorney Eric Schneidewind, a former member of the state Public Service Commission, which regulates utilities, worry that the big Michigan energy firms are beginning the drumbeat for some kind of public financing for a new plant.

But Michigan consumers already pay some of the highest rates in the Midwest for electricity, and those costs will increase when the subsidies paid by businesses to keep residential rates lower are removed.

The state can assist the power companies, however, by streamlining the regulatory process for siting new plants. Ultimately, Michigan likely will need a major new coal-burning plant, or even a new nuclear power plant to meet electricity demands.

The current regulatory process makes siting such a plant an enormous challenge. Regulators should make sure state policies are designed to protect residents and the environment, but are not so oppressive that they discourage new plant construction.

While there's serious debate about how much electric capacity the state has at its disposal, most experts agree that more will be needed by 2009. That date can and should be extended by strengthening some of the systems already in place.

For example, upgrades to the state's electricity transmission system should be pursued. Also, the state needs to re-examine its electricity needs as the number of high-use manufacturing plants decline and are replaced by other industries that don't require as much overall power. Michigan also could buy electricity from new plants being planned in surrounding coal-producing states.

A panel of experts brought together by the Public Service Commission is examining these options and will have a preliminary report on July 1. Michigan is wrestling with the issue at a difficult time. It hasn't added capacity in two decades, yet demand for electricity increases between 1.5 percent and 3 percent a year. The state also still is trying to figure out the best way to bring competition to the market, which was introduced to customers four years ago, but hasn't worked well. About one in five businesses use alternative energy suppliers, and almost no residential crossovers have occurred.

That uncertainty makes the prospect of an independently constructed power plant unlikely, and it bolsters the argument against putting the taxpayers at risk as well. The state will need more power soon, but regulators should pull the plug on plans to force taxpayers to subsidize any new construction.



Metro De

Unfair review for Bi

The June 1 review of the lac CTS-V was an exceptional one ("Cadillac not so hot"). The reviewer Paul and Anita Lienert one knows, frequent state a bias against Bi automobiles. However, I this one crossed the line on a review to an attempt at malicious def

Michigan's economy greatly depends on the try and doesn't need News-sponsored smears conducted right in its back yard.

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Support the Big Th

For those Lexus, Toyota, Honda, Nissan and Mini owners who wonder why their houses are not appreciated to the same extent as in the United States, look no further. Only the vast majority of cars sold in Michigan are profit sharing and spent in Michigan, as in Metro Detroit.

Without the presence of three local car companies...