



By Linda K. Breggin

Hawaii's New 100% Portfolio Standard

The majority of states have some type of renewable portfolio standard, but last May Hawaii singled itself out by enacting legislation that requires electric utilities to sell 100 percent renewable energy by 2045.

The law passed almost unanimously, with bipartisan support — 50-1 in the House and 24-1 in the Senate. The legislation is based on the premise that Hawaii's reliance on imported fuel "drains the state's economy of billions of dollars each year," and that "a stronger local economy depends on a transition away from imported fuels and toward renewable local resources that provide a secure source of affordable energy." In a press release, Governor David Ige explains that Hawaii spends \$5 billion a year on oil and is "the most oil dependent state in the nation."

In testimony before the U.S. Senate, Mark Glick, administrator of the Hawaii State Energy Office, told the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources that "greater food and energy security along with a rising sense of the harmful impact of climate change" were among the factors that "created the urgency and momentum" for the state's clean energy initiatives.

Hawaii's renewable energy requirements are phased in over several years: 30 percent by 2020; 40 percent by 2030; and 70 percent by

2040. According to Glick, 21 percent of the state's energy currently is from renewable resources.

The law allows for deviation from the requirements for certain "events or circumstances outside an electric utility company's reasonable control." These include, for example, if a utility cannot obtain enough renewable energy to meet the RPS goals after 2030 "in a manner that is beneficial to Hawaii's economy in relation to comparable fossil fuel resources."

The bill's author, State Representative Chris Lee, and U.S. Climate Plan Executive Director Evan Weber point out in an opinion piece in *Newsweek* that the legislation is particularly ambitious because Hawaii's grid is isolated. In contrast, excess renewable power can be transmitted among states in other parts of the country. Accordingly, Lee and Weber assert that if Hawaii can achieve its 100 percent RPS surely other states can as well.

Commentators are quick to point out, however, that Hawaii has more incentive than most states to use renewables given the high price of importing fossil fuels and the state's ample wind and sunshine. Furthermore, while many laud the unprecedented goal, SunVision Solar's Mark Mangelsdorf told *E&E News* that the 100 percent requirement is just a "feel-good exercise," because the level of storage that would be required across the grid is not achievable in the time frame needed. Similarly, a *New York Times* editor recently blogged about the myriad impediments Hawaii faces, such as residents' resistance to wind farms that can mar the landscape.

Nevertheless, the state anticipates that the law will drive innovation and investment in its clean energy sector. In an interview with a *Washington Post* reporter, an optimistic Ige cites Hawaii's plethora of renewable resources — including not only solar

and wind but geothermal and hydro — and explains that storage technology already is available, although it is not currently cost effective. He says he does not have "any doubt" that in the next thirty years the goal can be met.

And, Hawaii is not the only state setting ambitious targets. A state almost 5,000 miles away, Vermont, recently enacted a 75 percent renewable energy requirement by 2032 — with an interim goal of 55 percent by 2017. Other leaders include Maine (40 percent by 2017) and New York (29 percent by 2015). In addition, the California State Assembly is considering legislation passed by the state Senate that would increase the state's RPS from 33 percent by 2020 to 50 percent by 2030.

Although the Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency indicates that 29 states and the District of Columbia have renewable portfolio standards, not all are moving in the direction of Hawaii and Vermont. For example,

The state's renewable energy mandate is aspirational and inspirational as well

West Virginia recently repealed its RPS and Kansas changed its RPS to a voluntary goal. Furthermore, as of April 2015, the Center for the New Energy

Economy estimated that 87 separate RPS bills were pending in 32 state legislatures across the country. The bills include some that would weaken the state's RPS (26), others that would bolster it (29), and many that would modify the standard in some way (32).

In the midst of this flurry of RPS legislative activity, Hawaii's 100 percent standard, even if only aspirational at this point, should be inspirational to states making decisions about their renewable energy futures.

Linda K. Breggin is a senior attorney in ELI's Center for State and Local Environmental Programs. She can be reached at breggin@eli.org.