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# Texas House votes to expand energy efficiency programs; critic says energy savings claims 'wildly exaggerated'

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By Mark Lisher



Despite questions about its cost effectiveness by members of the state's [Public Utility Commission](#), the Legislature is ordering utilities to expand energy-efficiency programs which currently cost more than \$100 million a year.

After reshaping it and batting it back and forth between chambers, the House Wednesday passed by a vote of 99-34 [Senate Bill 1125](#) by [Sen. John Carona](#), R-Dallas, and [Rep. Rafael Anchia](#), D-Dallas.

The bill, which goes on to Gov. Rick Perry for his signature, increases the energy efficiency goals of a utility from 20 percent to 30 percent of its annual growth in demand by residential and commercial customers beginning by Dec. 31, 2013 and every year thereafter.

The expanded program encourages the use of renewable power generation such as solar, wind and biofuels, and broadens the latitude for providing rebates and incentives directly to customers.

Applauded by environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, the effectiveness of the programs for the money spent on them led Donna Nelson, one of the three members of the Public Utility Commission, to vote against a measure that was the basis for Carona's legislation last July.

Among her concerns, several shared by commission member Kenneth Anderson Jr., was a study challenging the long-held assumption that for every dollar spent on energy efficiency many dollars are saved on energy costs. Anderson voted for the measure to put the question of the program's value in the hands of the Legislature, according to a transcript of the July 30 meeting in Austin.

[Bill Peacock](#), with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, said the study he co-authored contends that those energy savings might well be nonexistent. Texas utility customers have paid \$591.1 million for the energy programs since 2002. Peacock estimated the cost is likely to pass \$200 million a year when this new legislation goes into effect.

"We've disputed the way they've done their testing for a long time," Peacock says. "The way they do it has nothing to do with reality. These energy saving claims are wildly exaggerated. SB 1125 is carte blanche to expand these as much as they want, whenever they want."

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