Sebelius calls for renewable energy mandates

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TOPEKA — The governor now says her voluntary standards for renewable power in Kansas aren’t enough — they should be law.

At a press briefing in her office Friday, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius said she’d like to see legislators codify goals for power companies to invest 10 percent in green energy by 2010 and 20 percent by 2020.

Her statement comes as 27 states have mandated renewable standards, and the federal government is discussing doing so as well.

Kansas utilities traditionally have opposed such mandates. Instead, Sebelius and executives of the state’s power companies agreed last year to voluntary goals.

Since then, utilities have said they expect to meet them and have continued to announce new wind energy investments.

A Kansas City Power & Light spokesman said the company didn’t believe a mandate was necessary.

“Kansas City Power & Light is already pursuing, subject to regulatory approval, our commitment to the governor’s voluntary wind energy goal,” said Mike Deggendorf, vice president of public affairs.

The company noted the governor didn’t clarify at Friday’s press conference whether the state should have a mandatory or voluntary standard in law.

Still, Kansas remains at about 4 percent wind power, with the remainder of its electricity generated mostly from coal as well as some natural gas and nuclear energy.

Legislators who drafted a bill to facilitate construction of two new coal-fired plants this week added some green energy provisions as well, but didn’t go as far as adding a renewable mandate.

Rep. Annie Kuether, D-Topeka, and Sen. Janis Lee, D-Kensington, who helped author the bill, were questioned about the issue during a Democratic caucus Wednesday.

Kuether said a renewable portfolio standard had not been discussed. When asked why, Kuether said it was because “there has been a sense in this state than an RPS (renewable portfolio standard) would not pass.”

However Rep. Tom Holland, D-Baldwin, said Friday that he’s seen plenty of interest in more action to require wind, solar and other forms of power.

Holland, a panelist on green energy at public forums that drew crowds last week at Baker University and the University of Kansas, said he’d “love having a renewable portfolio standard.”

“I think that’s a very long-term energy strategy our state and country needs to have going forward,” Holland said.

Constituents appear to be ahead of their legislators in calling for change on the energy scene, he said.

“I think this is really something that’s starting to catch the public’s attention.”

Nancy Jackson, executive director of the Land Institute’s Climate and Energy Project at Salina, said there’s a strong case to be made for renewable portfolio standards requiring utilities to dedicate part of their investments to clean energy.

“It should be fairly easy to achieve,” she said. “Our primary goal is to see energy efficiency and wind energy pursued aggressively, and other states with a (renewable standard) have shown it’s possible to do that.”

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