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SMITH PACKAGE TO PROMOTE RENEWABLE ENERGY ADVANCES IN LEGISLATURE

TRENTON - Two bills sponsored by Senator Bob Smith which would promote renewable energy systems in New Jersey homes advanced in the Legislature today.

"Renewable energy offers our best hope of cutting our reliance on foreign oil and powering our homes through environmentally-conscious means," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chair of the Senate Environment Committee. "Through advances in the technology and the popularity of renewable energy sources, such as solar panels or wind or water generators, these systems have become far more common in homes across the Garden State. New Jersey should adopt initiatives which promote this technology, and protect our natural resources."

Senator Smith's first bill, a Senate Committee Substitute for S-1497 and S-2409, would exempt the value of renewable energy home systems from local property taxes. The bill would require that the system be certified by the local code enforcing agency before the exemption is granted, and defines renewable energy as energy produced using solar technology, photovoltaic technology, wind energy, fuel cells, geothermal technologies, wave or tidal action, methane gas from landfills, or hydropower. The bill was approved by the Senate by a vote of 37-0, and now heads to the Assembly for consideration.

"Local governments should not penalize energy consumers who are choosing environmentally-friendly alternatives," said Senator Smith. "Through this bill, any home improvement designed to tap into a renewable energy source would be off-limits from property taxation."

Senator Smith's second bill, S-2154, would direct the Board of Public Utilities (BPU), in consultation with the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Housing and Mortgage Finance Association (HMFA), to provide down-payment assistance to middle-income families seeking to install renewable energy systems in their homes. The bill stipulates that the program is only available to families who earn up to 110 percent of the county median income. The bill would also require the Commissioner of the DCA to amend the energy subcode of the Universal Construction Code to establish enhanced energy-saving construction requirements. This bill was approved by the Assembly by a vote of 68-11, with one abstention, and is currently pending consideration before the full Senate.

"As more families are learning the benefits of renewable energy, we need to prepare building regulations and offer economic assistance to take advantage of this burgeoning technology," said Senator Smith. "Right now, installing renewable energy systems is cost-prohibitive for many middle-income families, despite the many benefits not just in lowering their energy bills but in benefiting the environment as a whole. The State needs to step up our support of renewable energy, to ensure a cleaner, greener future for the Garden State."

Both bills were part of a green buildings bill package approved by the Senate