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SMITH RENEWABLE ENERGY PACKAGE SIGNED INTO LAW

PISCATAWAY – A package of bills sponsored by Senator Bob Smith which will promote renewable energy usage throughout the State of New Jersey was signed into law today by Governor Corzine at the Busch Cogeneration Facility at Rutgers University's Busch campus.

"Today, the Governor has taken a strong step forward in promoting clean, sustainable energy and New Jersey's burgeoning green economy," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chair of the Senate Environment Committee. "As we continue to work to put New Jersey on strong financial footings during this national economic crisis, we need to look to alternative energy production as a valuable part of that, reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and creating hundreds of new green collar jobs in the Garden State. These new laws will lower utility bills, advance renewable energy production, and serve as incentives to business growth in the State."

The first bill in the package, S-1299/A2550, permits the location of certain wind and solar energy generating facilities in areas zoned for industrial use. The bill stipulates that any lot which is at least 20 contiguous acres, owned by a single person or entity, and zoned for industrial use would fall under the provisions of this bill. Senator Smith noted that the intent of the legislation is to supersede local zoning ordinances, which can sometimes be guided by a NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) mentality, prohibiting development without regard to the public benefits of the project.

"Renewable energy shouldn't be reserved only for those communities close enough to off-shore wind farms – or with enough open space set aside for solar energy farms – to reap the benefit," said Senator Smith. "New Jersey puts a strong emphasis on redeveloping our aging urban and suburban core, and rightly so. As we promote redevelopment of our aging communities, we should also encourage renewable energy projects which will directly benefit the people living in those communities, by reducing their utility bills."

The second bill in the package, S-2265/A1558, requires a developer of new residential development of 25 or more dwelling units to offer to install a solar energy system when a prospective owner enters into negotiations with the developer to purchase a dwelling unit. Under the bill, developers will be required to disclose in advertizing that a prospective owner may have a solar energy system installed in any unit; the total cost of installation; and a comprehensive information packet on solar energy systems. The Commissioner of Community Affairs, in consultation with the Board of Public Utilities (BPU), will be responsible for setting technical standards for the solar energy equipment through the legislation, and developers will have to comply within 90 days of the adoption of technical standards.

"Solar energy has become a popular alternative for residential energy consumers, and I think, if given the choice, more and more homeowners would opt to go green in order to save green," said Senator Smith. "This bill ensures that for new residential development, home buyers will have an opportunity to choose renewable energy from the start. As we urge homeowners to adopt environmentally sustainable practices, this will be a valuable tool in encouraging solar energy as a part of the green energy paradigm."

A final bill in the package, S-1932, sponsored by Senators Teresa Ruiz, D-Essex and Passaic, and Bob Gordon, D-Bergen, authorizes the BPU to use revenue from the existing retail margin charge levied against large industrial or commercial energy consumers to fund grants for projects designed to lower energy usage and reduce energy cost by those consumers.

Specifically, the grant program will apply to projects which promote combined heat and power co-generation, to tap the heat produced from electrical generation to offset other utility bills.

Currently, there is already over \$100 million in the Retail Margin Fund, and the fund will continue to grow over time. Of the funding available, \$60 million will be appropriated to provide grants to companies seeking to install or expand combined heat and power production. All grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis, and grant amounts will vary based on the amount of energy generated per company.

"I applaud Senators Ruiz and Gordon for pushing a bill which will have far-reaching implications, not just for industrial energy consumers, but for the entire State," said Senator Smith. "When New Jersey makes a substantial investment in promoting alternative energy, that benefits every single person tapped into the grid, lowering energy usage and creating new jobs to build these co-gen facilities. This bill, in concert with the other green energy incentives signed into law today, will make New Jersey a friendlier place to do business, and will encourage economic development moves forward in an environmentally sustainable manner in the years ahead."

All three bills received final legislative approval earlier in the month