

Protect higher education MAP funding for Illinois' future

By DAVID W. TRETTER

Never has the danger of election cycles and political expediency been more apparent – or more threatening – for



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higher education in Illinois than it is right now. Many legislators are serious about creating balanced budgets, embracing long-term planning and helping provide concrete funding commitments for our most valuable, core services and programs. To a person, Democrats and Republicans see the tremendous value their local community colleges, public and private colleges and universities create for their entire regions: billions of dollars in economic activity, and a brighter future for thousands to stay and thrive close to home.

But 2020 has only exacerbated the wide chasm between their best-laid plans and political realities. The coro-

navirus pandemic's economic blows are deep and long-lasting for all, and the defeat of the proposed "Fair Tax" constitutional amendment makes the state's budget deficit and future financial prospects more bleak than ever.

Already, the solutions on the table as lawmakers prepare to return for some semblance of a legislative session in 2021 are dire. They will have to work with Gov. JB Pritzker on a menu that includes severe, devastating budget cuts of 10 to 15 percent or more, allow the state to go more deeply in debt and risk unprecedented financial impacts and junk bond ratings, or support increasing tax revenues. The reality is some combination will be needed.

In that process, it is imperative we bring together policymakers to rally behind the most valuable priorities that should be protected. Illinois' need-based Monetary Award Program (MAP) has broad-based support around the state and is just what we need to preserve as our universities and colleges rebound.

Higher education has suffered a brutal series of cuts in the past 20 years, more than nearly all areas of state govern-

ment since 2002. Yet MAP continues to be a source of hope and light for the thousands of students who receive it.

Just like state and federal aid is keeping businesses open and families in their homes now, MAP is the stabilizing force for low-income students – often minority and going to college for the first time in their family's history. We have more work to do to help minority and underserved students, yet MAP already provides a lifeline for more than 50 percent of all African-American and Hispanic students going to Illinois colleges and universities. Our next challenge for those students and their families is to work with our institutions and legislators to reduce student debt loads and remove their obstacles to success beyond high school.

The return on the state's investment in MAP is real and sustained. Every student who pushes himself and herself to go to college leads to more people working in better jobs, depending less on government support and paying more in taxes. When students from families who have never experienced going to college have a good experience, they plant roots here

and create more positive activity for our communities that multiplies over time.

The pandemic has created new economic realities. Prospective employees' education and preparation will matter more than ever. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment during the coronavirus shutdowns was much more stable for those with college degrees than those without – as much as a 25 percentage point difference.

Supporting MAP will help needy students, their institutions, and provide critical support for the 175,000 Illinoisans who work in our public and private higher education institutions with an economic impact of more than \$50 billion.

As Illinois works through its first steps toward recovery, higher education is ready to get to work – for our students today and those coming tomorrow. A strong commitment to securing MAP funding will help smooth the path ahead and create hope for a better future in these trying times.

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Study details economic impact of Illinois' renewable energy

EDITOR'S NOTE: This column is submitted by the American Clean Power Association.

Just as clean energy sources emerge in Illinois as a leading driver of economic growth, a new study has been released that details the full impact of achieving 50 percent renewable electricity generation by 2030. The first-of-its-kind study released by the American Clean Power Association highlights a once-in-a-generation economic opportunity with reaching majority renewable electricity generation in Illinois.

The study found that by reaching majority renewable electricity generation within the next decade, Illinois will see:

- \$25 billion in capital investments from wind and solar projects
- \$1.7 billion in state and local taxes from existing and projected land-based wind and utility solar projects
- \$1.2 billion in land-lease payments
- 31,500 good-paying renewable energy jobs
- 3 percent lower wholesale power prices

Clean energy resources - wind, solar, energy storage, hydropower, and other renewables - represent a once-in-a-generation opportunity to drive U.S. economic recovery and add hundreds of thousands of family-supporting jobs. According to a new, first-of-its-kind study released by global natural resources research consultancy Wood Mackenzie and the American Clean Power Association, reaching a majority renewables grid will deploy over \$1 trillion in capital investment into the American economy over the next decade, while supporting 980,000 direct jobs, stabilizing wholesale power prices, and reducing U.S. carbon emissions by over 60 percent. Targeted administrative actions and legislative policies are essential for the U.S. to achieve these benefits within the next 10 years.

"A majority renewables electric system for the U.S. is possible within a decade and will deliver much-needed investments in our economy and create a pathway toward steady, well-paying employment for workers across the country. This research shows that a collaborative promise of an American grid powered by wind, solar, hydropower, energy storage, and other renewables represents an economic powerhouse that will lead

our country towards a more prosperous, healthier, and cleaner future," said Amy Farrell, ACP senior vice president of Government and Public Affairs.

Earlier this year, the American wind, solar, hydropower, and energy storage industries united around a joint vision to generate over half of the country's electricity within 10 years. Pan-renewable industry leaders agreed to actively collaborate to achieve this target. The analysis from Wood Mackenzie details how renewable energy industries can collectively move towards building a more resilient, efficient, sustainable, and affordable American grid.

A recently released Clean Energy Road Map proposed by the American Wind Energy Association, which is merging into the American Clean Power Association in January 2021, lays out how the U.S. federal government can rapidly accelerate this economic growth and renewable energy deployment through executive and legislative action starting in 2021. As Wood Mackenzie's analysis makes clear, transmission infrastructure expansion and improvements are critical to enabling this transition to a cleaner American electric grid. Administrative actions to accelerate federal permitting and remove regulatory hurdles for transmission will help get affordable, clean power to where it is needed most by consumers, while also smoothly integrating offshore wind into the nation's energy portfolio. Continued advances in renewable energy technology and the increased use of energy storage to meet consumer demand will also help improve system reliability and drive wholesale power prices lower. And considering the strong empirical track record of transmission more than paying for itself, this future is possible with limited impact on customer wallets.

This is a win-win opportunity. Striving for high renewable penetration not only serves clean energy goals, but also supports economic growth. With these actions and policies in place wind, solar, energy storage, and transmission will directly employ nearly 1 million Americans by the end of the decade, including over 800,000 Americans in construction and technician jobs, alongside 173,000 in factory, distribution, and development jobs. These high-quality jobs in the clean energy workforce pay an average of \$60,000-

\$110,000/year. Significant investments in U.S. factories and domestic energy production will help achieve this progress and offer a new path to employment for displaced legacy energy industry workers as those industries begin to dial back.

Among the top-line results of the analysis, Wood Mackenzie finds:

- Administrative actions alone can double renewable energy penetration within the next decade:
 - A presidential administration can accelerate transmission infrastructure expansion to unlock wind and solar resources.
 - Under administrative actions alone, renewable energy can grow from 19 percent to 37 percent of U.S. electricity, due to transmission expansion, better access to federal lands and waters, and technology advancement.
 - Additional legislative policies that require and/or incentivize clean energy, accelerate the retirement of the U.S. coal fleet, significantly increase energy storage capacity, and massively improve grid infrastructure make a 50 percent renewable electric sector achievable.
 - Transmission focused policies are critical to unlocking renewable potential:
 - Upgrading existing transmission lines and building new lines will help alleviate congestion and provide low-cost power where it is needed most.
 - Northeast transmission upgrades will help offshore wind deliver power to consumers.
 - Significant investment in transmission infrastructure is foundational for a majority renewables future.
 - Presidential administrative and legislative actions driving to 50 percent renewable energy by 2030 can be a major source of economic stimulus:
 - 50 percent renewables by 2030 will catalyze nearly 1 million direct, quality, well-paying jobs in construction, installation, operations, manufacturing, and supply chain.
 - Average wholesale prices will remain stable and declining through the decade.
 - Grid stability and reliability are maintained through transmission, energy storage additions, and sufficient grid reserve margins.
 - Total capital investment to reach 50 percent renewables tops \$1 trillion by 2030, with at least a quarter of that investment occur-

ring local to renewable projects.

"This comprehensive analysis demonstrates that transforming the U.S. power grid is technically and commercially feasible, with appropriate policy support. This activity would unlock a tremendous economic development opportunity for infrastructure investment and associated jobs. Wood Mackenzie utilized our North America Power Markets Long-Term Outlook (H1 2020) as the base case and developed sensitivity scenarios to accelerate transmission infrastructure and achieve 50 percent renewable electricity nationwide. Federal and state policy initiatives are required to accelerate transmission development, increase adoption of energy storage technologies and continue the record-setting deployment of wind and solar technologies that have reached commercial maturity," said Aaron Barr, principal consultant in Wood Mackenzie's Energy Transition Practice.

The transition to a majority renewables electric grid will be led by significant growth in land-based wind, offshore wind, and solar capacity, alongside a corresponding increase in energy storage development. The job growth and investments associated with these new additions will far outweigh the losses as the nation phases out or retires legacy power technologies.

Unsurprisingly, this transition to a majority renewables future results in a significantly cleaner grid. During the decade, carbon emissions are estimated to decrease 60 percent, a level in line with the country's economy-wide target under the Paris Agreement.

The job benefits from a 50 percent renewable energy future will be felt in states from coast to coast. For example,

Illinois will be adding more than 20,000. Pushing towards a 50 percent renewable energy future is expected to deliver upwards of \$64 billion over the decade in tax and landowner-lease payments.

The industry is working on building a 21st century economy fueled by 21st century power.

As in every industry that has been disrupted in its history, the shift away from this country's reliance on now outdated and uneconomical electricity sources will provide innovation, investments, and new opportunities that transition America towards a more prosperous, cleaner future.