

Northern Pass project has benefits for state

By Robin Comstock

As one of the state's largest business organizations with nearly 1,000 members, the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce advocates on a variety of issues that have a significant impact on New Hampshire businesses.

One such issue that has been hotly debated as of late is the Northern Pass Project, which the Chamber believes will advance two of our organization's strategic goals: promoting regional economic development and promoting a sound infrastructure.

Looking past all the controversy, emotion, and rhetoric surrounding this project, it is clear the Northern Pass project will greatly benefit our state's business community.

The price of energy is commonly cited by our members and businesses across New Hampshire as a concern. Northern Pass will bring 1,200 megawatts (enough to power one million homes) of cheap, renewable energy from Canada into New England. This translates into significant energy savings for New Hampshire and the region. Indeed, Northern Pass will reduce energy costs for New Hampshire customers by \$20-35 million annually.

In addition, Northern Pass will provide New Hampshire with fuel diversity at a time when New England is becoming more and more dependent on natural gas, the price of which will likely not always be so low. Diversity, which brings stability, is good for business.

On the job front, Northern Pass will create 1,200 jobs per year over a three-year construction period at a time when job creation in the state remains sluggish. Northern Pass is committed to using local New Hampshire companies and labor for this project first, giving a shot in the arm to our neighbors and the local business community. In the long term, the creation of an additional 200 New Hampshire jobs per year is anticipated as a result of reduced energy costs as businesses can afford to invest elsewhere when energy is more affordable.

These economic benefits can be realized without compromising New Hampshire's environment, an element of the project that appeals to members of the Chamber's Green Committee. Indeed, the cheap, renewable hydropower made possible by the Northern Pass Project will improve the environment by reducing regional carbon dioxide emissions by up to five million tons each year – the equivalent of a year's worth of emissions from one million cars.

It should also be remembered that the construction of transmission lines to import hydroelectric and wind power from Canada is an action recommended by the New Hampshire Climate Action Plan issued in March, 2009.

Reducing energy costs for all customers, substantial job creation, generating new tax revenue for state and local government, protecting our environment by reducing carbon emissions, and planning for our future energy needs are all laudable policy goals that our state is striving towards. Meeting each of these goals individually is a challenge, yet Northern Pass is a chance for New Hampshire to take a step forward on all fronts. We simply cannot afford to let an opportunity like Northern Pass slip by.

Northern Pass is how the free market is supposed to work – private enterprise working to bring superior, lower cost products to consumers. It's time to work together to make this project a reality.

Robin Comstock is president and CEO of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

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