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Ohio's stalled energy projects cost jobs, study finds

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Six delayed or now-dead energy projects have cost Ohio's economy \$29 billion and more than 51,400 jobs, according to a new study released by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

It said the study is proof for Congress that the permitting process for such energy projects is broken and must be streamlined, said William Kovacs, senior vice president of environment, technology and regulatory affairs for the U.S. Chamber, the powerful pro-business group that represents 3 million American businesses.

"This study should serve as a wake-up call for legislative action to improve the permitting process," he said in a Thursday teleconference.

The chamber is also concerned that the projects are being stalled by opposition from Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY) activism and by a system that allows what it called "limitless lawsuits" by opponents, he said.

The six Ohio projects are:

— The Black Fork Wind Farm in Richland and Crawford counties. It is still alive, although it is facing local opposition.

— Integrated gasification combined cycle power plants by American Electric Power in Meigs County and a similar plant by Lima Energy in Allen County. AEP's project appears dead, while the Lima project is still alive, although it faces opposition.

— Dominion Power's now-dead coal-fired power plant in Conneaut.

— American Municipal Power's now-canceled coal-fired power plant in Meigs County.

— Beard Energy's coal-to-liquids plant at Wellsville in Columbiana County. It continues, despite opposition.

"These are projects that would create jobs in Ohio and give a much-needed boost to the state's economy, but with every day that passes, the more expensive the projects become. In most cases, if the projects are substantially delayed, they won't get built," Kovacs said.

"In going through the study, the results were simply startling," said Peter Morici, former chief economist at the International Trade Commission and the study's peer reviewer. "But the real surprise was how positively Ohio could be affected if it moved forward on just two projects."

The study identified 351 nuclear, coal, natural gas, renewable or transmission projects in 49 states that have been delayed or canceled as of March 2010 in its Project No Project initiative that got under way in 2008.

The initiative was designed to try for the first time to document and quantify development projects that have been slowed, jeopardized or canceled, Kovacs said.

The study by TeleNomic Research was conducted by Steve Pociask of the American Consumer Institute and John Fuhr of Widener University and the institute. The study projects that the 351 delayed projects have a development price tag of \$1.1 trillion and could create 1.9 million jobs.

"The numbers tell the story," Kovacs said. "Moving forward on a significant number of these projects could mean millions of jobs and do wonders for our economy. With our study, Congress can now point to tangible data on regulatory barriers to economic growth. Now is the time to act to remove unreasonable obstacles and restore balance to a broken process."

The findings are available online at <http://www.projectnoproject.com>.

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