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Editorial

## **A mighty wind: vote "no" on I-937**

Voters should blow off Initiative 937, the wind-power proposal.

Development of wind power, and other renewable sources of energy, should be a key part of the Northwest's future and should be encouraged by policymakers. But the Energy Security Initiative is not the benign endorsement of a worthy public-policy goal it pretends to be. It will inflate power rates and cost jobs in a state economy built on low-cost power but still trying to recover from the Western energy crisis of five years ago. Sponsors already admit to flaws that need fixing. The ballot measure is too complex for the initiative process, which lacks the Legislature's vigorous fine-tuning.

I-937 establishes renewable energy targets for private and public utilities that serve more than 25,000 customers. If the utilities don't meet the targets — ranging from 3 percent of their portfolios in 2012 to 15 percent in 2020 — they must pay fines.

This initiative is really about wind power. The initiative counts other renewables, such as biomass, solar and tidal power, but other approaches are less advanced.

Bizarrely, I-937 leaves out a biggie. Hydropower — that hallmark renewable of the Northwest — doesn't count, except for efficiencies made at qualifying utility dams since 1999.

That's right: *Hydropower doesn't count as renewable energy in the initiative.*

Statewide, about 60 percent of Washington's electricity needs are fueled by Bonneville Power Administration's 31 hydropower dams. Additionally, many local utilities, such as Seattle City Light, have their own hydropower dams. The initiative doesn't even count low-impact hydropower. City Light has taken pains to earn a low-impact certification for its Skagit dams.

Doesn't matter.

Eventually, even Seattle City Light, with a fuel mix that is 90 percent hydro, will have to buy non-hydro renewable power it doesn't need or buy "green tags," a direct subsidy to renewable generators.

So will Inland Power & Light in Eastern Washington, which gets 100 percent of its power from Bonneville and serves suburban and rural residents and farms on the eastern edge of the state.

Especially troubling is the omission from I-937's terse ballot title and summary of the likely increase in power rates — and subsequent economic impact. The I-937 campaign actually states energy rates will go down — an economic argument that defies reason.

Washington Research Council, which monitors tax policy, issued a report "Tilting Toward Windmills," which makes a compelling case the initiative will result in higher rates and lost jobs as businesses adjust to the new rules. The report finds that costs could increase above the measure's lip service about a 4-percent cap to as much as 8 percent — something several utility officials also see. That would translate to between 2,100 and 5,100 jobs lost by 2016 and 3,600 to 7,100 jobs in 2020, including any increase in wind-farm jobs.

Is it any wonder the Association of Washington Business and power-dependent companies, whose viability rest on the state's historically lower power rates, are opposing this measure?

Here's perhaps the most galling claim by initiative supporters. I-937's campaign argues Washington needs to "catch up" to the other states that have renewable portfolio standards, as if to suggest Washington is dirtier. Because of its reliance on hydropower, the Northwest's energy profile is among the cleanest in the nation.

Besides, change is under way. Many utilities already are buying or exploring other renewable resources — whether it's Puget Sound Energy's purchase of wind power from the Kittitas Valley or Snohomish County Public Utility District's investigation of tidal power.

I-937's ballot title is a lovely sounding thought, but the measure's complexity and its flaws would make a bad law.