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## Legislature is lost on electric policy

Michigan residents are well-versed at this point in the budgetary ineptitude of their state legislators.

The state's leadership crisis, though, extends beyond the budget. An example: Two state representatives want Gov. Jennifer Granholm to get out of the way so two coal-fired power plants can be built - even though the power plants aren't needed.

That's the conclusion of the Public Service Commission staff. They looked over proposals to build coal-fired power plants near Rogers City and Essexville. Based on their analysis of Michigan's energy needs, the staff says the two plants aren't needed now.

This isn't sitting well with the utility industry's allies under the Capitol Dome.

Reps. Kevin Eisenheimer and Ken Horn went so far as writing Granholm a letter that states, in part, "At a time when Michigan residents are facing record unemployment and businesses are looking to other states to invest in we must do everything to keep and bring jobs to Michigan."

Those claims don't change the fundamental problem: Michigan doesn't need the new generation.

That was a point made by a PSC report: Unless Consumers Energy was willing to commit to shutting down existing generation, it didn't need new generation for more than a decade.

(It takes about five years to build a big coal-fired electric plant, a PSC official told a Senate committee recently.)

Legislators should recall that power plants are paid for by ratepayers. In fact, under the "reform" of state electric law last year, utilities like Consumers can charge ratepayers for construction costs even before a construction project begins. The same law allows utilities such as Consumers to even charge ratepayers for some cost overruns on construction projects.

With struggling Michigan families potentially facing such costs, shouldn't the default position be not to build power plants unless they are absolutely needed?

Instead, bipartisan voices in the Legislature have opposed Granholm's effort to review plant proposals for actual need. Last month, Sen. Bruce Patterson went so far as to question the PSC staff findings since the PSC had been wrong in the past about Michigan's electric needs, Gongwer News Service reported.

Under the Capitol Dome, the thinking seems to be that Michigan should ring up the construction bills now and figure out everything else later. That's backward.

Lawmakers - with their record of missed deadlines and general budgetary incompetence - should avoid questioning others' professional judgment and records. It just looks bad.

An LSJ editorial

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