

Here are some excerpts from recent editorials that appeared in Minnesota newspapers.

On plastic surgery tax:

A proposed 6.5 percent sales tax for cosmetic surgery procedures could turn those Botox-injected smiles into frowns if one state lawmaker gets her way.

State Rep. Phyllis Kahn has proposed a bill in the Legislature that would extend the sales tax to appearance-enhancing procedures. These would include Botox injections, chemical skin peels, laser hair removal, spider vein treatments and other surgeries to move patients one step closer to physical perfection. The bill excludes procedures such as laser eye surgery and braces although some could argue that these too are cosmetic.

Minnesota wouldn't be the first state to add a sales tax to elective cosmetic procedures. New Jersey is collecting about \$11 million this year from the tax, and other states including Illinois, Texas and Washington have mulled over the potential revenue source.

Opponents say the tax would unfairly burden women, who make up roughly 90 percent of those who seek plastic surgery.

“It hurts working women who save up their money and work hard and try to do something for themselves once in a while,” said Dr. Richard D’Amico of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons in Chicago.

We must disagree. Legislators should have the option to tax elective surgeries meant only to improve appearance. However, in crafting legislation lawmakers must be very careful when categorizing which procedures are for aesthetic purposes and which are required to improve physical health — in essence, which are taxable and which are not. For example, a breast augmentation many times is done as a physical preference but in other cases is decided upon by a patient due to a bout with cancer. In the latter instance, the tax shouldn't be applied.

Kahn's proposal is far from the governor's pen. No vote has been taken on the bill, though it could wind up riding a larger tax bill that finds its way to Tim Pawlenty's desk. When the state every now and then talks of cutting services to meet budgets, we find appearance-enhancing plastic surgery one feasible way to add revenue to state coffers.

On renewable energy:

As a longtime supporter of tougher renewable energy standards for Minnesota, this board heartily applauds the Legislature's passage of the proposal known as "25 by 2025."

This plan, which requires most Minnesota energy companies to provide 25 percent of their power using renewable sources by 2025, could make Minnesota the national leader in mandating renewable energy, not to mention help it make a serious effort to break from reliance on fossil (and imported) fuels.

The House passed the plan Monday after it received Senate approval Feb. 7.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty, who in December spoke vociferously in support of such goals, was slated to sign it on Thursday.

The plan, which essentially replaces a good-faith agreement between the state and power producers to slowly increase reliance on renewables, is described as a compromise among those two entities, business leaders and elected officials.

It's been touted as a measure that eventually could save rate-payers up to \$500 million, not to mention boost jobs and local economies as many fledging industries (at least by American standards) strive to provide utilities with the tools to harness renewable energies. (Think sun, wind, hydrogen and biomass.)

Perhaps most notably, the plan holds the state's largest utility, Xcel Energy, to a standard even higher than 25 by 2025. Under the phased-in plan, Xcel has to hit the 25 percent mark in nine years and push that to 30 percent by 2020.

Other companies have to reach 20 percent by 2020 and 25 percent five years later.

So how much energy are we talking? Take wind as an example. It provides about 800 megawatts now for Minnesotans.

Collectively, in the next 18 years, power providers statewide could increase production to at least 5,000 megawatts, possibly more. For perspective, that's more than double the megawatts now provided just from Xcel's Sherco coal-burning power plant in Becker.

Of course, hitting these new standards won't be easy, and it might not be cheap in the short term.

Look no further than Xcel's already-announced plan to build a \$210 million wind farm that will provide 100 megawatts before 2010.

But the 25 by 2025 legislation does allow the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to amend or even delay implementation if potential costs of the standards take too big a toll on rate-payers.

That's a good short-term safeguard for customers already reeling from the rising costs of fossil fuels.

But the reality is the sooner Minnesota becomes less reliant on those fuels, the better off the state will be when it comes to long-term energy investments.