

New study says stalled energy projects slows job growth, GDP

by [Gillian Holmes](#)
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Stalled energy projects are costing Illinois \$40.9 billion and 67,600 jobs a year, according to a study released Thursday by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The business group said 15 projects have been delayed or canceled in the state due to a dysfunctional permit process and numerous lawsuits by “Not in My Back Yard” activists. Of all the delayed projects in the nation, almost half are renewable energy projects.

Brandon Leavitt, who installs solar panels for commercial and residential customers, said he is not at all surprised.

“The permit process is a nightmare in many communities,” said Leavitt, who owns Solar Service Inc. in Niles. “It has cost the company several installations, where the customer decided not to endure the costly and uncertain process. Each community can make its own rules, which change month to month depending on who’s in charge.”

He cited a current project in Logan Square that has been held up for seven months and cost the customer \$2,000 in permit fees so far “to put something on a flat roof that can’t be seen,” he said.

Leavitt installed a solar-powered water heating system on Mayor-elect Rahm Emanuel’s roof in February 2007, but “had we applied for a permit today, it might not have been installed,” he said. “Hopefully, he’ll have a better perspective [when he takes office].”

A spokeswoman for Emanuel declined to comment on the study, but pointed to Emanuel’s position on streamlining bureaucracy in general. Emanuel recently told the Midwest Energy Forum that he plans to make clean energy the focal point of Chicago’s economic growth.

The study also cited delays for large-scale wind energy projects in downstate Ogle County, which were first proposed in 2004 and for which “settlement seems unlikely.” A lawsuit filed by Patricia Muscarello, an Arizona resident who owns property in Ogle County, claims turbines would adversely affect her land.

Local union leaders demonstrated outside the Ogle County Courthouse Tuesday in opposition to the county’s Wind Energy Conversion Systems Subcommittee. The committee is

proposing setback distances between turbines and property lines that are twice the state average.

“Developers have said that would be a nail in the coffin for wind energy in Ogle County,” argued Ed Maher, a spokesman for Local 150 of the International Union of Operating Engineers. “Wind farms in DeKalb County have put hundreds of our members to work, not to mention iron workers, electricians and other construction workers. It also means permanent employment for technicians.”

He said the chairman of the committee, Bill Welty, is an “outspoken opponent of wind energy.”

Welty did not respond to requests for an interview.

Mike Reibel, an administrator at the Ogle County Planning and Zoning Department, said he was not in a position to comment.

Constructing and operating the delayed energy projects nationally for 20 years would add \$3.4 trillion to U.S. gross domestic product, including \$1.4 trillion in employment earnings from 1 million jobs per year, the study said.

By the Numbers

If stalled energy projects were approved, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates:

(Illinois)

- Annual GDP increase: \$40.9 billion
- Annual jobs created during construction: 67,600
- Annual jobs created during operation: 22,700
- United States
- Annual GDP increase: \$145 billion
- Annual jobs created during construction: 1.9 million
- Annual jobs created during operation: 791,200

Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce at www.projectnoproject.com