**Virginia makes big renewable power buy from Dominion**

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Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam said Oct. 18 that the commonwealth signed a contract with Dominion Energy Inc. to ensure that nearly a third of the electricity the government uses comes from renewable sources by 2022.

The agreement was announced a month after Northam, a Democrat, signed an executive order calling for Virginia to generate 30% of its electricity from renewables by 2030 and for the commonwealth to rely entirely on carbon-free sources of power by 2050. Other states have set similar targets.

"It's going to take a village to move forward with renewable energy in Virginia, but we can, all together, do that," Northam said at an event at George Mason University in northern Virginia. "Virginia is a leader."

The deal between Virginia and Dominion subsidiary Dominion Energy Virginia, known legally as Virginia Electric and Power Co., calls for the commonwealth to buy electricity from renewable energy projects totaling about 420 MW, including Apex Clean Energy Inc.'s 75-MW Rocky Forge Wind Farm.

"The opportunities for utility-scale renewable energy and for electrifying ... transportation is a virtuous cycle," Apex President and CEO Mark Goodwin said. "It creates opportunity for companies like Apex and Dominion to provide clean energy products, and it encourages businesses to come to our state because they know we have an atmosphere that is transitioning from carbon-based electricity to more renewable and clean electricity."

Pointing to Dominion's plan to build a large wind farm off Virginia's coast, Liz Burdock, president and CEO of the Business Network for Offshore Wind, said the commonwealth is making "significant" progress fostering an up-and-coming industry.

The commonwealth's other power purchases, totaling 345 MW, will come from four solar projects: the 88-MW Belcher Solar Project in Louisa County, owned by Dominion and developed by Virginia Solar LLC and MAP Energy LLC; the 70-MW Bedford Solar Center in the city of Chesapeake, being developed by Ørsted A/S subsidiary Lincoln Clean Energy LLC; the 90-MW Walnut Solar Project in King and Queen County, being developed by Open Road Renewables LLC; and one project still to be identified.

No changes seen to Va. utility regulation

To advance its clean energy initiatives, the Northam administration is partnering with a utility company that is facing a backlash over perceptions that it uses political donations to wield outsized influence in Virginia. In August, Virginia utility regulators said Dominion Energy Virginia earned $277.3 million above its authorized return on equity in 2018.

Some lawmakers in the Southeast U.S. have called for breaking up monopoly utility businesses such as Dominion's, arguing that customers would benefit from more competition.

Northam said he does not plan to overhaul utility regulation in Virginia. "I think right now as we move forward, we're going to work with the system that we have," he told S&P Global Market Intelligence. "That doesn't mean it's a perfect system, but it is a system that we can work with."

Dominion Chairman, President and CEO Thomas Farrell II praised Northam's focus on clean energy and said his company "immediately embraced" the governor's statewide targets.

"We are transforming everything we do to build a more sustainable future for our customers, our communities and our company," Farrell said Oct. 18. "So, governor, we accept your clean-energy challenge and look forward to many more announcements like this."