

STATE NEWS

Evergy receives Missouri approval to build gas plants, solar farms after Kansas thumbs-up

BY: MORGAN CHILSON
Kansas Reflector

Missouri utility regulators on Thursday approved Evergy's request to build three natural gas plants and two solar farms, freeing the company to move forward with infrastructure projects that will cost more than \$2.75 billion.

The four-member Missouri Public Service Commission board approved the facilities after hearing presentations about the facilities two weeks ago and despite worries about investing in solar energy.

"Personally, the solar case is concerning," said MPSC chairwoman Kayla Hahn. "I recognize that we need more generation, and in particular, Evergy West needs more generation. However, intermittent resources such as solar as standalone projects seem to make little sense and may not be the best choice in terms of resource planning and the best use of ratepayer dollars."

Hahn said her concerns were pertinent in light of federal changes to green energy tax credits, among other issues. The state faces conflicting issues with the need to build replacement and additional generation and the need to keep rates affordable, she said.

"It's increasingly important that a critical view is taken of any request for new generation," Hahn said. "Because we are in a situation where the need for additional generation for Evergy West, who has been and continues to be short on its own generation, is so great, I'm not going to stand in the way of allowing more generation resources to be added."

Evergy announced last year its intent to build the gas plants — two in Kansas and one in Missouri — and the solar plants, one in each state. The company sought pre-approval for the projects through Kansas and



Evergy has approval from Kansas and Missouri regulators to build three natural gas plants and two solar fields. (Sherman Smith/Kansas Reflector)

Missouri regulators.

They received approval from the Kansas Corporation Commission in early July.

Evergy Missouri West, the Evergy subsidiary serving Missouri customers, and Evergy Kansas Central, which serves Kansas customers, will own 50% each of the two Kansas gas plants. The two 710-megawatt facilities, located in Sumner and Reno counties, are expected to cost \$788.75 million and \$800.52 million, respectively.

Evergy Missouri West will own 100% of a 440-megawatt natural gas facility in Nodaway County, Missouri, with a price tag of \$835 million. It will also own Foxtrot Solar Energy, a 107 megawatt solar farm in Jasper County, Missouri, estimated to cost \$213.8 million.

Evergy Kansas Central will own 100% of a 75-megawatt solar farm, Sunflower Sky Solar Project, in Wilson County, Kansas, estimated to cost \$128.8 million.

Darrin Ives, Evergy vice president

of regulatory affairs, told MPSC commissioners Thursday there had been "a lot of movement" about tax credits and tariffs at the federal level.

"At this stage, we still need some information from the Treasury," he said. "But by and large, with the budget reconciliation bill, they've set up a path and a plan that, while it's scaled back significantly the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) subsidies around carbon-free generation, it has left a pathway for these projects."

Ives said there's also a pathway to complete the project by the end of 2027 and still qualify for tax credits. Ives said the issues were part of settlement discussions, and Evergy will be required to give updates on any changes with tax credit availability, among other reporting requirements.

In a press release after the MPSC decision Thursday, the Sierra Club said it opposed Evergy's proposal. The nonprofit intervened in the MPSC case.

"No party, except Evergy, argued that the gas plant proposals are eco-

nomically feasible, a critical factor in the Missouri approval process," the release said.

"If Evergy's application is approved as submitted, Missouri ratepayers will be on the hook for gas plants that are likely to be unprofitable, operate less than expected and incur high maintenance costs or even premature failure due to excessive generator starts and cycling," testified Michael Goggin, a Sierra Club expert witness, before MPSC.

Billy Davies, Sierra Club's Missouri chapter organizer based in Kansas City, said in the press release that Evergy shareholders, rather than ratepayers, should shoulder the costs of generation expansion.

"Sadly, the PSC is enabling utilities and multi-billion dollar tech companies to use average Missouri families as piggy banks to power new data centers," Davies said. "The last hope for the commission to protect Missouri families from utility bill shock is to have a strong large user fee that ensures multi-billion dollar tech companies pay their fair share of these new power plants being built in the name of their data centers."

Evergy spokeswoman Gina Penzig said the company was pleased the MPSC approved the plants.

"Current construction schedules should allow the solar plants to benefit from federal tax credits, and those benefits will be passed to customers served by the plants," she said.

Tariff levels are changing frequently, so it is difficult to quantify their effect on the projects, she said.

"If they stay in place over a long term, the cost of capital projects like new generation would increase," Penzig said. "As we negotiate contracts with suppliers, we are always focused on keeping our costs low because that impacts our customers' rates. Some aspects of the new generation projects are already under contract."

Kansas governor candidate Cindy Holscher objects to alleged pressure campaign by Kelly's staff

■ Governor's chief of staff says Holscher misrepresents political discussions

BY: TIM CARPENTER
Kansas Reflector

State Sen. Cindy Holscher expressed frustration Friday with behind-the-scenes involvement of Gov. Laura Kelly's staff in attempting to influence who launched a campaign for the Kansas Democratic Party's nomination for governor in 2026.

Holscher, who announced her bid for governor in June, said she was among three Democrats in the Kansas Senate told by the Kelly administration to stand aside so Democratic primary voters would be more likely to nominate Lawrence attorney Chris Mann in the race to determine who would be the party's choice to replace the term-limited Kelly.

Holscher said she as well as Sens. Dinah Sykes and Ethan Corson, also of Johnson County, were initially discouraged from impeding Mann's path in the August 2026 primary for governor.

"All three of us were told basically 'do not run' because Chris Mann's the guy," Holscher said. "Why are insiders picking candidates? We're being bullied, essentially."

After the dust cleared at the end of July, Mann had chosen to launch another campaign for attorney general after narrowly losing to Republican Kris Kobach in 2022. Corson and Holscher had declared their campaigns for governor. Kelly threw her support to Corson. Lt. Gov. David Toland, at one point the presumed frontrunner in a Democratic gubernatorial race, said he wouldn't run. Sykes remained on the sideline.

Will Lawrence, Kelly's chief of staff, said the two-term governor met with potential Democratic candidates for governor and offered advice on how each could approach the 2026 election cycle.

"No one told them, 'You can't run.' They can make their own decisions," Lawrence



Sen. Cindy Holscher, a Johnson County Democrat seeking the party's nomination for governor in 2026, said staff in the administration of Gov. Laura Kelly attempted to pressure Democratic lawmakers into idling their campaigns for governor so a preferred candidate could prevail. (Grace Hills/Kansas Reflector)

said. "There's a lot of give and take in those conversations. It was never forceful. Cindy was the one that kept coming to the governor trying to get her support. The governor kept saying, 'I'm not going to support you in the governor's race if that's what you choose to do.' The governor was very clear about that."

Lawrence said Kelly would prefer Democrats didn't set the stage for grueling primary battles in statewide races. He said that at one point Holscher asked the governor's office to help narrow the field for benefit of her candidacy.

'GONE BACKWARD'

In an interview, Holscher said it was disappointing Lawrence had participated in an effort to essentially anoint a Democratic nominee for governor.

Holscher also asserted Lawrence attempted to leverage future political support from the governor to secure Holscher's vote for a bill altering regulation of child care facilities and exemptions to vaccination mandates. Holscher said it was concerning that Lawrence wielded financial influence over Democratic campaigns by controlling the governor's Middle of the Road political action committee.

"This whole situation is

what frustrates Democrats," Holscher said.

She said Democrats suffered under Republican supermajorities in the House and Senate. In the Senate, the GOP edge stands at 31-9 — the same mix as in 2018. The House GOP majority is 88-37, representing the addition of three Republican representatives since 2018.

"If you take a look, you know, we've had the governor's office the past seven years. We haven't advanced in terms of growing our numbers. We've gone backward," she said.

Lawrence, who has held a leadership role with the governor's \$2.3 million PAC, made a push during the 2024 elections to alter the balance of power in the Legislature. The Republican supermajority was targeted by Democrats because the GOP's numerical advantage made it easier to override Kelly's vetoes. Outcome of the 2024 election was a disappointment for Democrats up and down the ballot, Lawrence said.

'EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTING'

Holscher notified Lawrence in mid-June about her views on the Kelly administration's involvement in the development of Democratic campaigns for governor. Holscher

sent a text to Lawrence, obtained by Kansas Reflector, that included a warning that Holscher would "swiftly hand over all the proof I have to the press" of the governor's intervention in Democratic campaigns.

"I am so done with the games coming from you and the governor's office," Holscher's message to Lawrence said. "I want to be very clear about something."

Holscher vowed she would go to the media if anyone affiliated with the Kelly administration "says anything negative about me or my candidacy," attempted to interfere with Holscher's hiring of campaign staff or in signing up volunteers, "does so much as attempt to put a thumb on the scale in any way to interfere with this election" or made use of the Democratic Governors Association, which is led by Kelly, to "impede or negatively influence" her Democratic primary.

In the interview, Lawrence said language used by Holscher in the text could be interpreted as an attempt to intentionally gain something of value from Lawrence or Kelly against their will.

"It would be worthwhile for Cindy to take a look at the statute and reassess how she communicates with people," Lawrence said. "Extremely disappointing behavior. Questionable behavior. Not someone who has gubernatorial temperament, who has to compromise and negotiate on things every day in this building."

In a July social media post after Kelly embraced Corson's candidacy for governor, Holscher offered an explanation as to why Kelly chose to support Corson.

Holscher wrote pressure had been applied by Lawrence regarding an upcoming vote during the 2025 session on House Bill 2045. It rolled back child care safety standards and tinkered with exemptions to vaccination mandates. Holscher voted against the bill, which passed the House and Senate with bipartisan votes and was signed into law by Kelly.

"I had received tons of emails from constituents adamantly opposed to the bill," Holscher's post said. "The gov and Will (her chief of staff), told me that if I didn't support it, the governor's office wouldn't be supportive of me in future races. I wasn't going to go against my district and the people I represent, so I voted 'no.' So, it looks like they are holding true to that threat."

Lawrence said he didn't agree with Holscher's analysis of meetings the senator had with the governor about the legislation. In addition, he said, Holscher committed to help the governor secure support of Democrats for the bill while sustaining her personal opposition to it.

"That vote has nothing to do with the gubernatorial election," Lawrence said.

'HAVEN'T PAID ATTENTION'

Holscher, elected to the House in 2016 and to the Senate in 2020, has been endorsed by former Lt. Gov. Lynn Rogers. He served in Kelly's first term before appointed to the job of Kansas state treasurer in 2021.

Corson, who entered the Senate in 2021, said in an interview at the Capitol that he appreciated Kelly's expression of support. It was helpful to voters because Kansans wanted the kind of bipartisan, moderate leadership delivered by Kelly since sworn into office in 2019, Corson said.

He said he hadn't taken notice of social media chatter about Holscher's claims of how the Kelly administration handled legislators who declined to fall into line with the governor.

"I just haven't seen any of that," Corson said. "I haven't paid attention to it. We've been out there talking to folks and trying to meet people in real life."

Candidates lined up to take part in the Kansas Republican Party's campaign for governor included Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt, Senate President Ty Masterson, Secretary of State Scott Schwab and former Gov. Jeff Colyer.