Lincoln (AP)–Nebraska is trailing its neighbors in wind-energy development and missing an opportunity to add jobs to the state economy while producing a cleaner form of energy, according to a report released Thursday.

A group of lawmakers and environmental advocates unveiled the report as they argued that Nebraska is well-positioned to tap wind as a renewable energy resource.

Nebraska ranks as the fourth-best wind-producing state in the nation but 25th in the amount it could produce with the equipment currently has installed, according to the report commissioned on behalf of the Nebraska Sierra Club. Nebraska lags behind its neighboring states: Iowa, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado and Kansas.

Lawmakers and environmental advocates said they planned to pitch wind-energy to local public power districts that regulate energy usage throughout the state. The Nebraska Sierra Club is also preparing a series of clean-energy radio ads that will air during University of Nebraska football games, said Ken Winston, the group's policy advocate.

"We have enormous potential, but we're not using that potential," said state Sen. Ken Haar, of Malcolm. "Investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency will ultimately lower costs for Nebraskans."

Haar said Nebraska's reliance on coal is pumping money into Wyoming through an excise tax that helps offset the cost of property taxes in that state.

The report was released two days after the dedication of a new wind farm near Broken Bow. The $145 million project is expected to generate $540,000 a year in lease royalties for landowners over its 25-year lifespan.

Renewable energy advocates are scheduled to gather next week in Lincoln for the state's fifth annual wind-energy conference.

Skip Laitner, an Arizona-based energy economist who authored the report, said expanding wind energy could save Nebraska consumers a combined $3.8 billion over the next two decades. Laitner said a wind energy expansion could yield nearly 14,000 new jobs in Nebraska over the next two decades.

Laitner said Nebraskans will spend an estimated $2.7 billion this year to meet their energy needs, and their consumption will pour 71,000 tons of sulfur dioxide and 44,000 tons of nitrogen dioxide into the atmosphere. Laitner said those emissions create "profound health problems" that add about $700 million to the nation's annual health care costs.

"You stack up that kind of a perspective and then step back and ask a question: Can we do it better?" Laitner said. "The numbers clearly indicate that, yes, we can."

Nebraska Farmers Union President John Hansen said wind power has the same economic-growth potential for the state as ethanol. Nebraska has the nation's second-largest ethanol production capacity, behind Iowa.

"There was a very long list of folks who said it would never work, it can't be done, this is just pie in the sky, it will never happen," Hansen said.

Now, he said, ethanol has created generated billions for the state's economy.

Omaha Sen. Heath Mello said he, Haar and other lawmakers have tried unsuccessfully to pass renewable energy tax credits in recent years, while tax credits for other business ventures have won approval and received praise from the governor.

"We've passed sales tax exemptions for biochips, for data centers, and a variety of other industries," Mello said. "I think the issue at hand for us as state policymakers is: Why are we not

looking at our tax structure to try to incentivize market growth in this industry?”