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Bill requiring green building now law after veto rejected

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COLUMBIA - A bill that aims to make South Carolina more energy independent became law Wednesday after the Senate overrode Gov. Mark Sanford's veto. The House shot down the veto on Tuesday.

The new law requires state-funded buildings - either new construction larger than 10,000 square feet, or renovation projects involving at least 50 percent of a building - to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Silver standard for energy efficiency. It also requires new or renovated public K-12 schools to meet the LEED Silver standard.

Sanford vetoed the bill June 14, saying that "green" construction should be encouraged but not forced.

"We believe that we should certainly encourage the types of construction contemplated in this legislation but ultimately leave the decision to the institution or governmental entity in question," Sanford wrote in his veto message. "To do otherwise is to mandate raising the cost of government or education in circumstances that may not warrant the mandate."

The LEED rating system has four levels. Achieving a LEED Silver rating adds about 2 percent to a project's cost, but the state's Board of Economic Advisors said an estimated 30 percent reduction in energy costs per square foot could be expected.

Sen. Jim Ritchie, who sponsored the Senate legislation, and Rep. Joan Brady, who pushed it in the House, both said they were surprised by Sanford's veto.

"This is the type of positive step that fits with his policies and his new (Climate, Energy and Commerce) advisory committee," Brady said.

Brady said spending the extra money up front would be a good

investment for the state.

"This is one of those decisions as elected officials we can make that affect the future. If we build smart and build green now, we'll save money in the future."

Ritchie said the new law puts South Carolina out front in energy efficiency.

"This bill sets very balanced standards for sustainable construction," Ritchie said. "That will save the taxpayers money and help establish energy independence."