

January 10, 2016 1:14AM

Your Turn, NH -- Scott Filion: Lower energy costs essential to staying competitive

THE RISING COST of energy in New Hampshire threatens Velcro Companies' ability to maintain its position as a brand leader in a cost-competitive, global market. This is true despite the company's leadership in industrial energy efficiency. Velcro Companies employs almost 800 people in Manchester and Somersworth, with major manufacturing facilities in both locations. Moreover, our Manchester campus is home to the company's global innovation center and serves as the headquarters for Velcro Americas, which oversees all of our North and South American operations. To remain competitive with companies elsewhere in the U.S. and around the world, Velcro Companies requires a reliable, low-cost supply of energy to complement our unwavering commitment to energy efficient operations.

The company has invested heavily to attempt to control our energy costs, making us a recognized leader in industrial energy efficiency. Most notably, our Manchester campus operates a 4.3 megawatt, natural gas-fired, combined heat and power plant. The plant features a heat recovery steam generator that provides nearly 100 percent of the electric and thermal energy for the facility. We also use this steam to help melt snow and ice on the property. It's important for the public and policymakers at all levels of government to understand that despite these efforts, the cost of energy remains a major concern for the company.

The New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission, the New England States' Committee on Energy, and the region's independent grid operator, ISO-New England, all attribute past and anticipated future energy supply constraints and high cost to the lack of natural gas pipeline capacity and new sources of electricity coming into the region. Price volatility and high costs continue to have an adverse impact on our operations in New Hampshire. As one of the largest consumers of natural gas in the state, Velcro Companies agrees with the conclusions of the independent entities referenced above: that additional natural gas pipeline capacity and the introduction of additional electricity supply into the region will increase reliability and lower costs. The company also agrees with the Business and Industry Association of New Hampshire, leading state economists, and public policy think tanks that without accessing and harnessing abundant, low-cost natural gas and renewable energy, New Hampshire's economy will become even less competitive.

My colleagues and I in Manchester and Somersworth pride ourselves on Velcro Companies being a responsible corporate citizen. We also pride ourselves on being

residents of New Hampshire who appreciate the natural resources and quality of life that our great state has to offer. All of us at Velcro Companies appreciate the need to balance the benefits of siting new energy infrastructure with the critical need to protect our environment and the public's right to be heard on all proposed projects. We believe that with a thoughtful, timely and well-defined regulatory environment, this balance can be achieved without compromising these objectives. Failure to achieve this balance very soon will hurt the ability of Velcro Companies — and businesses statewide — to compete regionally, nationally and globally.

Scott Fillion is president of Velcro Companies' Velcro Americas region, which is located in Manchester.