

The Senate Side

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by State Senator John Putney

Renewable energy and green jobs are currently the focus of much discussion. This week, the Governor unveiled an energy plan that would establish a renewable energy standard of 25% by 2025. As more details to this grand plan are revealed, it is important to keep in mind that renewable sources are not capable of supplying base load power like coal. It is the reason renewable energy sources provide only 5 percent of Iowa's electricity while coal provides more than 75 percent.

Iowa currently receives approximately 75% of its electricity through affordable, clean-burning coal. Any legislative action that restricts Iowa's ability to utilize this resource will not only hamper our ability to recruit businesses looking for reliable base load capacity, but will increase home energy costs for all Iowans.

Over the past 35 years, coal consumption in the U.S. has nearly tripled. At the same time, air quality has improved and emissions from coal-based electricity are 30 percent lower despite increased use. As technology advances, power plants are routinely retrofitted to capture more emissions, including the capture and safe storage of carbon dioxide. The days of dirty, black smoke polluting Iowa's air are over.

Coal provides a constant, reliable flow of base load power and its transmission capabilities can help further diversify Iowa's energy portfolio. There is a shortage of transmission lines in the renewable sector across the country and it is a fact that construction of new coal-fueled plants and accompanying transmission lines lead to advances in wind power.

The cost of energy makes a huge difference in the quality of life for many Iowans. It is estimated that nearly 10 percent of households in this country are spending half their income to cover energy related expenditures. Regulations that diminish the use of coal in Iowa will likely result in increased reliance on natural gas at more than twice the cost. And like oil, America gets the majority of its natural gas from foreign sources.

Iowa's energy mix must be balanced and include renewable energy sources—but we also must realize that we need coal based electricity and cannot conduct our business or lives without it. Ultimately, technology-based solutions offer the greatest hope for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The U.S. and nations around the world can achieve meaningful reductions in GHG emissions and other pollutants by employing advanced clean coal technologies. Iowa and our nation should invest in clean coal research so in the near future, coal becomes an emission-free source of low cost energy found in our own back yard. Your thoughts and opinions are important to me. Please contact me at: 515-281-3371 or john.putney@legis.state.ia.us