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Utah Urged to Try Renewable Energy

Advocates pushing for government incentives in 6 Western states, with goal of 20 percent increase by 2020

JESUS LOPEZ JR. THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Advocates of renewable energy sources are calling on the Utah Legislature to step up to the plate during debate over national energy policy and approve measures that would ease the state toward consuming more environmentally friendly power. Through tax breaks,

the advocates hope to push Utah beyond its tiny percentage of its electricity that comes from renewable sources, and at the same time reduce pollution and the so-called greenhouse gases that cause global warming. Their ambitious goal is a 20 percent increase in the use of renewable energy by 2020.

Utah gets 97.5 percent of its energy from fossil fuels, said O.T. Ford, who on Thursday was among those releasing a report on renewable energy from his U.S. Public Interest Research Group. Other groups were the Union of Concerned Scientists, Utahns for an Energy Efficient Economy and Utah Windpower Campaign.

Christine Watson, energy engineer for Utah's Department of Natural Resources, pushed a tax credit for 25 percent of the installation cost, up to \$2,000, for renewable energy equipment. She also hopes the state will provide breaks on sales taxes for such equipment.

"It is almost like they are double taxed," she said.

Watson and Ford, along with Sarah Wright of the Utah Windpower Campaign, presented the report, *Generating Success: How States Are Putting Renewable Energy Into Action*, at a news conference at Uinta Brewing Co.'s new facility, 1722 S. Fremont Dr., because the brewery buys electricity at higher than the normal price, the difference going for the added cost of generating wind power.

On Friday, the Union of Concerned Scientists said greater use of renewable energy could translate into billions of dollars in investments, income and utility savings for six Western states, including Utah. Increasing the use of renewable energy to 20 percent nationwide would create nearly \$12 billion in new investments across Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming, the group said.

If the nationwide share of renewable energy increased to 20 percent, farmers, ranchers and other landowners in the six-state region would reap \$170 million in lease payments for wind turbines, according to a study by the group.

Wright said the use of wind to generate electricity is gaining momentum throughout the country.

"At least wind is not a Republican or Democratic issue," she said. "George W. Bush was governor of Texas when they passed their wind energy policy."

Renewal sources, though higher now in cost, have a great advantage over coal or petroleum-fired electrical generation. Electricity production from carbon-based fuels causes more air pollution than gas-burning vehicles, Wright said.

"It's out of sight, out of mind," she said. "A lot of people don't connect their electricity supply with the coal mine in central Utah."

Although always an environmental topic, advocacy for renewable energy was spurred by last summer's California energy crisis. "It certainly has raised awareness publicly," Ford said, "but unfortunately it has given excuses for politicians to do things badly."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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