

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

Charleston Gazette (West Virginia)

December 14, 2007, Friday

Manchin praises new state energy plan

BYLINE: Ken Ward Jr.

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. P2A

LENGTH: 643 words

kward@wvgazette.com

Gov. Joe Manchin promoted his administration's new energy plan on Thursday, despite citizen complaints that it ignores growing global concern over greenhouse gases.

Manchin said his goal was to increase the use of West Virginia coal and to make the state "energy independent."

The plan's focus is development of five plants to turn coal into liquid fuel that could replace much of the state's petroleum consumption.

"We're looking at how we maximize the resources we have and how we can do it in a much more environmentally friendly way - a cleaner and greener fashion," Manchin told the state Public Energy Authority.

Manchin appeared at the authority's afternoon meeting to thank members for their work on the plan and for holding three public hearings to gather input on the document.

'A slap in the face'

But Vivian Stockman, project coordinator for the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, said the final plan ignores citizen objections to Manchin's coal-to-liquid proposals.

"The plan was not at all changed because of the public hearings," Stockman said. "That was a slap in the face to the public. Why did we have these hearings if the public was not going to be listened to?"

Division of Energy director Jeff Herholdt, who wrote Manchin's plan, did not respond to Stockman's comments.

The final plan, released Thursday, calls on the state to replace 1.3 billion barrels of oil per year with liquid coal by 2030. That figure represents about 60 percent of state oil consumption, or roughly the percentage that is imported.

Herholdt estimates the state could meet that goal with five 20,000-barrel-per-day liquid coal plants. Those plants would require a roughly 15 percent increase in coal production.

But environmentalists and many energy experts worry that liquid coal will, at best, not help deal with climate change and, at worst, make the problem far worse.

Liquid coal production plants will create carbon dioxide emissions, and burning liquid fuel in vehicles will create those emissions as well.

By some estimates, liquid coal could produce double the greenhouse gases that gasoline or diesel fuel emits.

Manchin and the coal industry are banking on efforts to find effective and affordable ways to capture carbon dioxide emissions from liquid coal plants and pump them underground.

The final energy plan concedes that such technology "is still in the experimental/demonstration stage and has not been proven to be financially and technically viable yet for existing plants." But, it says, "there is guarded optimism that cur-

Manchin praises new state energy plan Charleston Gazette (West Virginia) December 14, 2007, Friday

rent studies and experiments will refine and prove sequestration technology to be technically feasible, financially sound and environmentally safe."

Still, some studies indicate that, even with carbon sequestration, liquid coal would produce between 4 percent and 8 percent more greenhouse pollution than regular gasoline.

'We have to do something'

Spencer environmentalist Mary Wildlife showed PEA members a copy of Wednesday's Gazette featuring an Associated Press story about the increased rate at which Arctic ice is melting.

"We're not in the yellow zone anymore," Wildlife told authority members. "We're in the red zone. We have to do something about this."

During Thursday's meeting, West Virginia University researcher Carl Irwin explained a variety of ways that state business and industry could become more energy efficient.

Irwin showed a graphic that indicated West Virginia industry uses more energy per dollar of gross state product than surrounding states.

Irwin said the state could meet 20 percent of Manchin's energy independence goal by becoming more efficient.

Under that topic, though, the Manchin administration plan says its only recommendation is to "maintain a strong interaction with industry on energy efficiency opportunities."

To contact staff writer Ken Ward Jr., use e-mail or call 348-1702.

LOAD-DATE: December 14, 2007

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

Copyright 2007 Charleston Newspapers