

Cut Emissions With Integrated Initiatives

BY JENNIFER SALISBURY

New Mexico First

New Mexico can become a global leader in diversified energy production. Is this an attainable goal or just a pipe dream? Over 200 New Mexicans representing business, education, environment and government interests believe this goal is within reach. They recognize that our state has world-class resources below our feet — coal, oil, gas and geothermal — and above our heads — solar and wind.

However, before we can effectively “do it all,” we must help conventional energy production become cleaner, renewable energy production more stable, and energy policies at federal, state, local and tribal levels more integrated.

These ideas are the consensus of the 200 attendees at the 2009 statewide energy town hall, a three-day deliberation organized by the nonpartisan organization New Mexico First. Town hall participants ultimately agreed on 18 recommendations that, if implemented, will help catapult our state into a leadership role in energy nationally and potentially globally.

Conventional power: Production of fossil fuels, such as oil, gas, and coal, has been and will continue to be a key element of our state’s economy and, on the electricity side, an essential part of our state’s current energy mix. The majority of New Mexico’s electricity comes from coal. Yet, important as coal is to our economy, coal-fired power plants currently produce about 80 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions

released into the atmosphere through electricity production. Great strides have been made to make power plants cleaner, but town hall participants recognize the continued need for incentives in development and commercialization of technologies to reduce emissions even further.

Renewable power: Renewable energy is also key to the state’s future economy. Town hall attendees acknowledge the positive role that existing tax incentives play in boosting wind and solar energy development. They call for a long-term commitment to these types of incentives as well as research into improved energy storage technologies and new power sources such as algae-based fuels.

Town hall participants also see the urgency of a more robust, modern transmission system capable of carrying both conventional and renewable power to homes and businesses across New Mexico and for export to our neighboring states.

Conservation and efficiency: Not all the solutions focus on producing more power, however. The town hall participants see the essential role of conservation and efficiency; they recommend practical actions like changing building codes, weatherizing homes and switching light bulbs.

Collaborate on a long-term plan: All these efforts will take time, money and coordination. Many of the town hall participants have watched past reform efforts start strong but sputter out. They know that Washington’s policies are not always in

sync with those developed in Santa Fe or by tribal governments. So the town hall calls for a 20-year integrated energy plan that will be a template for the future.

New Mexico’s abundant energy resources mean we are positioned to assume a leadership role in our nation’s energy future. Many New Mexicans want our state to be at the forefront. But the window of opportunity may close if we do not act decisively. Certainly, the rest of the nation isn’t waiting for our state to show the way. So, let us work together to champion the sensible, diversified energy production that many New Mexicans believe will move us forward.

Jennifer Salisbury is the chair of the implementation team for New Mexico First’s 2009 energy town hall. She is an attorney and former secretary of the state Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department.