

WORC

Western Organization of Resource Councils

February 2010

Dear Senator:

WORC has long been involved in developing energy policies for our nation that make good sense for the farms, ranches, small businesses, and rural communities of our Western states. We are writing to call your attention to the opportunities before this Congress to make impressive gains in the area of clean and renewable energy and energy efficiency in legislation likely to come before the Senate in the months ahead. As Congress considers proposals to increase production from a wide variety of domestic energy sources in energy and climate legislation, we strongly urge you to insist that clean, renewable energy and energy efficiency measures are aggressively embraced.

While our Western states have an abundance of natural resources and energy-related minerals, we also possess some of the finest wind resources and reliable solar, small hydro, renewable biomass, and other clean and renewable resources. It can only be to our advantage to proactively guide energy policy in the direction of clean, renewable, efficient and locally owned energy supplies that create jobs across a wide spectrum of Western communities large and small.

To that end, WORC urges you to support a strong Renewable Electricity Standard (RES) of 25% by 2025 and, in addition, a strong Energy Efficiency Standard (EES) of 10% by 2025. Three states in the WORC network have already adopted Renewable Electricity Standards: Montana, Oregon, and Colorado.

As part of an RES, we also are urging that 25% of the overall standard be dedicated to locally owned renewable energy projects. Such an innovative feature was enacted in Montana in 2005 as part of its RES and is now resulting in much coveted good jobs and income in rural areas. A community wind project and a local irrigation company are two recent power sources to help meet this requirement. Oregon's law has built in incentives for small locally owned generators and Colorado has legislation pending in its current Legislature to add this important element to its strong RES.

Since so many of the large wind and solar companies originate outside U.S. borders, such a provision would help to establish and build capacity in a domestic renewable energy industry, as well as result in greater prosperity in local economies.

Congress should also ensure that incentives for renewable energy production be structured so that local businesses can participate in this leading edge of our economy. In countries like Denmark and Germany, for instance, the use of feed-in-tariffs has enabled much local business development and ownership of the robust renewable energy industry.

That kind of distributed and locally owned generation is something we need in our highly rural Western region.

We also urge you to resist any attempts to include coal with carbon capture and sequestration or nuclear generation as renewable under the standard. Both of these highly expensive technologies pose numerous, serious environmental hazards and storage problems and cannot honestly be characterized as “renewable.” Mountaintop removal; coal strip mining and aquifer removal; and in situ uranium mining bear significant long term costs to the productivity and viability of the land. Moreover, these nonrenewable energy sources are far less available than widely touted, when economical recoverability, and critical competing uses of the land are taken into account. Such a step is unnecessary as there are already sufficient tested, proven, affordable, environmentally benign and job-intensive truly renewable options to meet a standard of 25%.

We also urge your support for much stronger building codes that will strengthen the construction and materials manufacturing sectors, high quality jobs, and ultimately yield more disposable income on an ongoing basis for years to come due to vastly lower heating and lighting costs.

For more information, please contact Margie MacDonald at WORC’s main office in Billings, Montana at 406.252.9672 (mmacdonald@worc.org) or Anna Lucas at WORC’s Washington, DC, office at 202.547.7040 (alucas@worc.org).

Thank you for our consideration,

Shane Kolb, Chair
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Meadow, SD

Ramon Lara, Chair
Oregon Rural Action
Baker City, OR

Marie Hoff, Chair
Dakota Resource Council
Bismarck, ND

Bob LaResche, Chair
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Sheridan, WY

Holly Waddell, Chair
Dakota Rural Action
Shade Hill, SD

Gretchen Nicholoff, Chair
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Idaho Rural Council
King Hill, ID

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