

## **A Vote for a National Renewable Energy Standard is a Vote for the Future of America**

Congress has a lot of problems to address this year and included in that mix is a bill that will create a national renewable standard for this country. Amid all the problems of joblessness and economic turmoil, why should our representatives, Evan Bayh and Richard Lugar of Indiana, vote in favor of such a bill? What does a national renewable standard mean for us Americans? This bill will benefit us by allowing job creation, boost manufacturing and construction, help spur growth in pre-existing industries, allow the U.S. to be competitive in the current and future market place, and help us reduce our dependency on foreign oil.

It will allow job creation by sending a positive message to investors that the U.S. is serious about renewable energy. The lack of a national standard has hindered the ability to attract wind manufacturerers and investments, according to Denise Bode, the CEO of the American Wind Energy Association. Investments will help boost the manufacturing and construction sector which have been severely hurt by the economic slow-down. For example, there would be an increased demand for steel for wind turbine towers and support equipment. A mandate for high building efficiency will also help pre-existing industries affiliated with housing, which have also been affected by the economic slow-down. It will increase demand for insulation, energy-efficient windows and appliances to name a few.

The U.S. has already fallen behind in competitiveness with China and Europe on clean energy development. The U.S. was once a leader in solar manufacturing but is now surpassed by China and Europe. Countries such as Germany and China have realized the opportunity and moved quickly to seize upon it. In addition, China is predicted to be the largest producer of wind by 2013. Currently, more than 60 countries, including China, have adopted some kind of national renewable standard. It is not too late for the U.S., but we have to act now.

Perhaps more importantly, a strong renewable standard will also help reduce our dependency on foreign oil, a limited resource surrounded in conflict and costs. The future cost of oil and natural gas is certain to go increasing demand and decreasing supply. Some Indiana co-ops and other utilities around the nation are already enacting increased rates due to anticipation of this and due to the need for expansion.

The potential for growth and job creation in the United States is recognized by some, including utilities themselves and a few states. Utility companies around the country have recognized the advantage of green technologies as interest in solar energy by utility companies has spiked in the last 18 months. These companies are offering programs to make it cheaper for their customer to install solar systems. These systems will help them comply with restriction of pollution emissions and avoid added cost to install new generating capacities. Duke Energy has even signed agreements with Chinese energy companies to help develop new technologies and renewable ones such

as solar. Chief technology officer for Duke, David Mohler believes this partnership will allow Duke to bring “new technology to market quicker”.

In addition, over 25 states across the country have approved renewable energy standards on their own. Let’s look at the state closest to Indiana that has been successful at retooling for green jobs. Ohio is starting to move away from the traditional heavy industry that has been the root of its past success and, according to the US conference of mayors, has an estimated 16,000 green jobs. These jobs are focused on renewable energy, biofuels, and efficiency and comprise areas as diverse as agriculture, renewable power, engineering, research, manufacturing, construction and government. Renewable energy is one of the fastest growing sectors in the economy for the state. Ohio is now in the top 5 for the number of clean energy jobs. Elsewhere in Gainesville, FL, the renewable energy market is booming due to local support of strong policies. Other states are also trying to duplicate their success, including Michigan where Governor Granholm believes policy will help salvage the state’s economy and lead to thousands of new jobs.

However, the states cannot do it alone. A state standard does not carry the same cachet as a national standard. To realize the full potential for renewable energy, we need politicians to get involved and implementation of good public policies. It is not difficult to see that energy will be a primary concern for people in the future. What are the consequences of remaining status quo and doing nothing? We will face a world in which an aging utility grid cannot consistently support increasing demand, leading to power interruption; poorer air quality; increasing energy cost that will hurt the middle and lower classes; continued dependency on foreign oil; and a world in which the U.S. will fail to compete globally with other nations that have realized the potential early on and acted quickly. It is not too late to act, but time is running out and so are our options.