

Environmental Council Develops Its Own Energy Plan

By **BETH GORCZYCA RYAN**

bethg@statejournal.com

CHARLESTON — The West Virginia Environmental Council is speaking out against Gov. Joe Manchin's energy plan, saying it is not aggressive or forward-looking enough and relies too much on coal.

Instead, the council, which lobbies on behalf of several environmental groups throughout the state, issued its own energy plan, called the Citizens' Energy Plan, that it believes would position West Virginia for economic opportunities and a sustainable future.

"Our plan is in response to the Division of Energy and the governor's energy opportunity document — we don't even call it a plan. It doesn't even measure up to a proposal," said Don Garvin, the Environmental Council's legislative coordinator, during a Jan. 10 press conference at the Capitol that was attended by a handful of lawmakers.

The Council's eight-page plan outlines steps the state can take to decrease global warming, reduce residents' energy costs and reduce the state's dependence on foreign oil. Some of those steps include:

- Encouraging the state to adopt renewable portfolio standards, which recommends West Virginia require electric utilities to generate a minimum of 25 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2025. Vickie Wolfe with the Council said about 30 states already have adopted similar standards.

- Undertaking a study to determine whether the state has enough sunlight to use "concentrating solar power," which is considered a less expensive method than the traditional photovoltaic panels. If the study determines the state is a good site for CSP, the council recommends using mountaintop removal sites as possible CSP locations.

liquid technologies. Both technologies were mentioned during Manchin's Jan. 9 State of the State Address as possible areas of future economic growth.

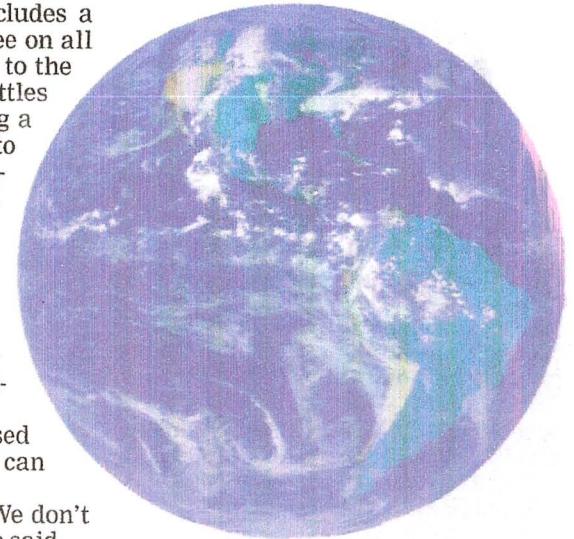
"Joe (Manchin) just doesn't get it, does he?" said Janice Nease, executive director of the Coal River Mountain Watch, an environmental group that is affiliated with the Environmental Council. "We have to do something about coal. We have to phase it out. There are better options out there. ... We have to face the hard truth, and we have to face it now: We cannot plan a future based on coal."

During the press conference, Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, said she would introduce several pieces of legislation during the current session that would get the ball rolling on some of the council's plans.

The legislation includes a bottle bill that would place a fee on all bottles that would be returned to the buyer when they turned the bottles in for recycling, a bill creating a global warming commission to study West Virginia's contributions to global warming, a bill requiring vehicle emission reductions, a bill establishing a renewable energy portfolio for the state and a green buildings bill requiring new state-funded structures to use environmentally friendly building techniques.

Similar bills have been passed in other states, she said, and can work here.

"We can learn from others. We don't have to reinvent the wheel," she said.



■ Adopting a goal of locating 10,000 solar roofs in the state by 2011. As part of that goal, the council wants the state to establish a training and certification program for solar panel installers and encourage the **Department of Environmental Protection** to increase the public's awareness of a federal tax credit that helps cover the expense of installing solar panels.

■ Encouraging more use of public transportation by allocating 10 percent of highway construction funds to mass transit systems, park-and-ride lots and biking trails.

■ Mandating a strict fuel efficiency standard for all state vehicles, including requiring the state to use hybrid vehicles whenever possible.

■ Changing the state's vehicle registration fee so it is based upon a car's fuel efficiency instead of its value. "So if you drive a gas guzzler, you'll pay more, but if you drive a car like a Prius, you'll pay almost nothing," Wolfe said.

■ Pass several bills relating to improving the energy efficiency of state buildings and homes, including adopting tax incentives for homeowners who make homes more efficient and enact incentives to encourage more people to offer professional home energy audits.

In addition, the council said it supports investment in biofuels and the development of small-scale, home-based wind energy facilities as well as commercial-scale wind farms, as long as those farms meet environmental impact regulations and enforcement. However, the council supports regulation that protects viewsheds.

The council's plan takes a strong stance against coal, opposing all forms of mountaintop removal mining and shunning the governor's push for investments in clean-coal and coal-to-