

Manchin continues push for coal

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CHARLESTON (AP) - Gov. Joe Manchin is continuing his push for making coal the centerpiece of national energy policy.

The idea has a chance with support from Wyoming, Montana and other leading energy states that participated in a December summit, Manchin told a decidedly pro-coal 35th West Virginia Mining Symposium on Thursday. "By myself, we can't do it," he said, adding that cooperation with 10 other states means something will happen.

Manchin said he envisions a plan that relies on technology to produce cleaner electricity as well as motor fuels and natural gas from coal. Any plan also would need to include natural gas, crude oil and alternative fuels such as biomass, wind and solar. Manchin also touched on clean coal technology during his State of the State address Wednesday.

"By 2030, this nation could be truly independent," Manchin said. During a brief meeting with reporters, Manchin added that "Coal is going to be our energy, our major energy source for at least the next 30 or 50 years."

National energy policy also needs to address the high cost of clean coal technology, Manchin said. While electric utility Appalachian Power's proposed clean-coal plant in Marion County is "a natural" for West Virginia, he said national energy policy should prevent the exorbitant cost of such plants being borne by utility customers in one state.

Appalachian Power has estimated the plant would cost \$2.23 billion. It would burn gas made from coal, a process that the American Electric Power subsidiary says would allow it to remove more pollutants.

Appalachian Power plans to test whether it can capture carbon dioxide at the plant and store it successfully underground. Manchin noted to reporters that injecting carbon dioxide can increase recovery from oil and gas wells, two other important industries for the state.

"We just should be doing things a lot better and smarter," he said.

State environmental groups oppose Manchin's pursuit of coal-to-liquid technology as unproven and costly.

Though they credited Manchin for including global warming in his State of the State, they complained at a Capitol press conference Thursday that his legislative agenda ignored all their recommendations.

They countered with a "Citizens' Energy Plan." Among other measures, it would make public buildings more efficient, promote conservation and link a vehicle's registration fee to its fuel efficiency instead of its value.

“We need to develop an energy plan that isn't afraid to tackle the tough topics,” said Don Garvin, lobbyist for the West Virginia Environmental Council.

Such groups as Coal River Mountain Watch called Thursday for an end to all mining.

Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, said she will champion several goals of the citizens' plan during the session. One would require power plants to tap renewables for 25 percent of their output, buying at least some of that from local producers, by 2025.

More than half of the states have some sort of renewable portfolio standards, WVEC's Vickie Wolfe said.

“We need to plan now,” Fleischauer said.

“Now is late, but we need to start.”