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Energy Expert to State Lawmakers: Global Warming is Not a Partisan Issue

by: [Wendy Norris](#)
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Looking to 2008: Guest commentaries on the coming state legislative session.

Continuing our new series, Colorado Confidential is publishing guest commentaries from politicians, former lawmakers, issues groups and others on their hopes for the 2008 state legislative session.

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Today, we invite you to read Colorado School of Mines' professor Thomas McKinnon's take on energy policy.

For the 2008 Colorado legislative session, with apologies to Dr. Martin Luther King, I too have a dream. I have a dream that our leaders in the Capitol will finally understand that addressing global warming is not a partisan issue. I have a dream that the bluest blue and the reddest red will come together to take on the toughest, most urgent problem humanity has ever faced. I dream that our representatives will realize that global warming is not a narrowly focused "enviro" issue but one that impacts the underlying fabric of our state. And that by addressing the problem we will strengthen our economy, gain energy security and enhance environmental health. I dream that Colorado will reclaim its pioneer culture and lead the nation to a new model.

Strengthening our economy is the most universally convincing motivation to tackle global warming. Who, from any political stripe, would oppose avoiding needless energy expenditures? And yet by not making energy efficiency a high priority we are, quite literally, tearing up hundred-dollar bills and throwing them out our windows. And what boosts our economy more than good jobs? Renewable energy creates far more employment than its fossil-fuel alternatives. Furthermore, many of these jobs will be created in our struggling rural areas. I have a dream that our legislators will realize that making investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency is the smart thing to do - regardless of how they feel about climate change.

Colorado is blessed with abundant renewable energy from nature - sunshine, wind and biomass - which can be harnessed to give us energy security. We have the technology today to begin replacing our insecure imported energy infrastructure with reliable renewables. The 2008 legislative session should work aggressively with the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and the state's electrical utilities to ensure

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that wind power and solar thermal electricity are rolled out on a rapid timetable - and to develop the infrastructure needed to exploit them. Our leadership should also offer incentives for the use of biomass for transportation fuel and electricity. I have a dream that when we are blackmailed by Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Russia's Vladimir Putin over energy supplies we'll be in a position to tell them just where they can put their oil.

The environmental beauty of Colorado enriches all our lives. And yet global warming is threatening the environment -- with deeper and more prolonged drought, increased wild fires, diminished crop yields, reduced snow pack and rapidly expanding bark beetles. I have a dream that 2008 will be the leadership turning point when our representatives communicate a clear message to their constituents about the need to face the challenge head on, and right now.

We can begin turning our dream into reality by embracing Gov. Bill Ritter's Colorado Climate Action Plan. In November Ritter laid out a bold agenda to reduce the emissions of global warming gasses 20 percent below 2005 levels by the year 2020. However, we must honestly acknowledge that Ritter's plan, while a good start, is not enough. The delegates at the recent UN climate change forum in Bali argued that we need to at least double the reductions proposed by Ritter.

To trim our global warming emissions to the required level, Colorado will need to make public investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency (RE/EE). These investments quickly pay themselves back, but they will require public funding. A small pollution fee placed on fossil fuels burned is all it would take to finance the effort. Setting the fee at only \$2 per metric ton of emitted carbon dioxide would cost a Colorado household with average energy consumption just \$3.50 per month. Yet it would raise \$180 million per year for an RE/EE fund. This fund will have approximately a three-fold return on investment by reducing our expenditures on fossil-fuel energy.

In 1963 Dr. King dreamed for the nation. At the time many did not want to support the vision. Yet we gradually embraced his goals and are a stronger nation as a result. It is time for us to work for a world that we will be proud to pass along to our grandchildren.

J. Thomas McKinnon is a professor of chemical engineering at the Colorado School of Mines. His research focuses on combustion, biofuels and nanomaterials. Dr. McKinnon is working with the Colorado Carbon Reduction Initiative, which advocates putting a small carbon fee on the 2008 ballot.

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