

## THE ENERGY DEBATE

One of the more interesting issues I have been dealing with during the off-session of the Legislature is the proposed coal-fired plant on the Pee Dee River. Several folks have contacted me about where I stand.

I support the plant. Here's why:

The most recent studies I have seen indicate that South Carolina will max out on its current electrical generation capacity some time in the middle of the next decade. There are two new nuclear plants currently in the early phases of development, but they will not be making electricity until 2017 at the earliest. Accordingly, unless we do something, we will run out of energy in the next few years. This has tremendous negative implications on our quality of life.

We hear a lot of good things about alternative/renewable/green technologies, such as solar, wind, tidal, and methane-recapture. And rightly so, as these technologies offer tremendous opportunities for the future. However, I have never seen, nor read, nor heard any reputable expert or organization contend that any of the new technologies will be readily and economically available within the necessary timeline. Indeed, I recently participated in an international forum on energy, where the general consensus was that some technologies, such as hydrogen, might not be available for 50 years or more. Similarly everything I have read indicates that solar energy – in the near future at least – will be wildly inefficient and outrageously expensive in our state. Wind offers even less opportunity for South Carolinians. Geothermal offers none.

Conservation is always an admirable plan, and there are things everyone can do to help conserve energy. For example, I have compact fluorescents in my house, use tankless water heaters, and boosted the insulation factor of our home to R-50+. I am also exploring the net-metering program offered by my local electric utility. However, not everybody wants – or is financially able – to make those sorts of changes rapidly. However, I have seen no studies that indicate that we can save our way out of the trap that we are facing in 2015.

**So, how do we deal with 2015? I would suggest that building new, clean, coal-fired plants are the most economical, and most environmentally responsible, way to generate the energy we need.**

New clean coal plants are dramatically more environmentally friendly than the older plants that generate our power today. They are also more efficient producers of energy. My understanding is that for every two new plants we open, we could close two – and possibly even three --- older, less environmentally-friendly plants. This would result in more electricity while at the same time lowering hazardous emissions. To me, that represents an incredibly sensible short-term approach as we continue to develop the alternative energy sources that can and will be the foundation of our long-term solution.

I am as interested as everyone else in breathing clean air and drinking clean water. I have 7-year-old triplets and feel charged to steward our environment on their behalf as best I can. I balance that against a desire to allow them to have the lights come on when they flip the switch. Unless we explore options such as the new clean-coal Pee Dee plant, my concern is that, when they graduate high school in 2017, there is a very real chance that won't happen.

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