

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert says free market will supply clean energy

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SALT LAKE CITY — A 10-year energy plan laid out by Gov. Gary Herbert on Tuesday opens the door to nuclear power but does not set mandates or specific targets regarding clean energy.

Rather, Herbert intends to rely on free enterprise to make Utah a net energy exporter and help get the country out of its energy-dependency crisis, he said.

Herbert's plan would use Utah State University, BYU and the University of Utah as a research triangle to bolster private industry attempts to create cleaner, cheaper sources of energy.

"We're at the forefront of technological development," he said. "Utah is uniquely poised."

Coal resources in Utah could last decades, and natural gas could go even further, but consumers are beginning to demand clean energy, Herbert said. He wants to mix renewable resources, such as wind power, with non-renewable sources to meet the growing demand.

Rocky Mountain Power, for instance, is already selling the second-highest amount of wind power in the country but has to back it up with coal-fired electricity, said company president Rich Walje. Customers are paying extra to use the renewable power.

Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon, a Democrat who is running against Herbert in this fall's special gubernatorial election, released a statement Tuesday criticizing the governor's plan.

"Unfortunately, our governor and state leaders have not shown a willingness to even support some of the concepts being proposed," Corroon said in the statement. Instead, Herbert has vetoed legislation that would let local governments better pursue green energy and another

that would have included an "opt out" provision for utility customers during peak summer power-usage periods.

Utah has been the only state in the Intermountain West to lose clean energy jobs over the last decade, the Corroon campaign points out.

Herbert did not specifically address global warming during Tuesday's press conference except to tell a television reporter that the preferred term was "climate change." The remarks stand in stark contrast to statements made during a Western Governor's Association conference, when he said the science is not necessarily conclusive on global warming and that most people do not understand it. Herbert was lieutenant governor at the time.

On another scientific front, Herbert plans to have a 14-member work group look at the possibility of nuclear power in Utah.

"The issue is not going to go away," Herbert said. "We have 100 nuclear power plants in this country in 31 different states."

The team is expected to have recommendations by the end of this year and will look at water, safety and waste issues regarding the controversial power source.

"Good science will make good policy, and we need to make sure we have good science that helps us," Herbert said.

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