Nevada Chapter

May 2, 2008

Position Statement on Energy in Nevada

The energy choices we make now will impact our lives and the lives of future generations. It is imperative that we make responsible, ethically- and morally-sound decisions about our energy consumption and methods of production.

Our energy choices are about much more than simply "keeping the lights on," since energy use clearly affects the entire planet, most prominently through climate change. Responsible energy decisions should account for this bigger picture in order to protect society and assure the best possible future for all residents, including those in other areas of the world.

The U.S. Green Building Council – Nevada Chapter recognizes that green building is a key part of the solution to climate change. We know it makes economic sense to build green, high-performance buildings and that this practice can be applied when remodeling existing buildings as well, greatly improving their energy efficiency.

The building sector is responsible for almost half of all greenhouse gas emissions. Leaders in the construction industry acknowledge the impact buildings have on our environment and recognize the huge potential for positive change that green building represents.

According to Rick Fedrizzi, President, CEO & Founding Chairman of USGBC, "Eliminating the built environment's negative contribution to climate change is not just a strategic priority, it's our collective responsibility to generations to come. Science tells us we have [little time] to meet that goal, and urgent action is required."[1]

The USGBC - Nevada Chapter is in agreement with our parent organization in supporting the goals of the 2030 Challenge[2], a program that specifically addresses this issue. It calls for immediate high-performance green building practices that steadily increase energy efficiency milestones every five years, culminating in carbon-neutral buildings by 2030[3].

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[1] Building Sector Unites to Confront Global Climate Change

[2] Building Design Leaders Collaborating on Carbon-Neutral Buildings by 2030

[3] Watch Ed Mazria's FACE IT video presentation for excellent summary of the issues and solution.

This strategy will achieve its intended objective only if it is part of a concerted effort to reduce the amount of greenhouse gasses released into the atmosphere. Carbon Dioxide (CO_2) is a major greenhouse gas that is primarily produced by burning fossil fuels, especially coal. Coal yields significantly more CO_2 than natural gas and is a major source of many other serious pollutants.

There have been discussions about capturing CO_2 from coal plants and storing it underground as a means to avoid negative impacts in the atmosphere. Carbon sequestration is not technically or economically viable at this time. In fact, it may never be a wise choice since reliably storing vast quantities of CO_2 over the long term is likely to be impossible[4]. It is not responsible to gamble our future on uncertainties of this magnitude.

Common sense, as well as our best science[5], dictates that we must reduce, not increase, the use of coal; not only in our state but worldwide. Nevada can play a leadership role in this urgently needed transition.

There is a growing body of scientific and practical evidence[6] indicating that Nevada can meet its future energy needs through a combination of energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy sources while also improving its economic stability. Nevada holds incredible potential for the creation of a balanced portfolio of clean energy sources using solar electric, solar thermal, geothermal, hydro and wind technologies. Through this, we would demonstrate leadership to the nation and the world.

Therefore, it is the position of the U.S. Green Building Council – Nevada Chapter that our state cannot afford the environmental and long-term economic ramifications associated with adding coal-fired power plants, and that these additional plants can be avoided with appropriate energy efficiency and renewable energy strategies. We believe we should go beyond the 2030 Challenge, that a state-wide goal of carbon-neutrality by 2030 is achievable, and that pursuing this course of action will yield strong environmental and economic benefits for our state. The eventual decommissioning of all existing coal plants is a wise course of action for our long-term social, economic and environmental health. We support the widespread adoption of energy-efficient green buildings, energy-efficiency upgrades to existing buildings, and the rapid adoption of clean, renewable energy systems for the entire State of Nevada. This approach will preclude the need for additional coal-fired power plants and facilitate the decommissioning of all existing ones.

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[4] Carbon Sequestration, Peter Montague, Rachel's Democracy & Health News #932, Nov. 8, 2007
[5] Testimony from Dr. James Hansen, NASA climate scientist, before the Iowa Utilities Board (PDF)
[6] Please see Energy Reports in the Reference section below.

References

Organizations

U.S. Green Building Council
http://www.usgbc.org/

U.S. Green Building Council – Nevada Chapter
http://www.usgbcnv.org/

2030 Challenge
http://www.architecture2030.org/2030_challenge/

Video

2030 Challenge: FACE IT Webcast
http://www.architecture2030.org/faceit/ (streaming or download)

Energy Reports

"Laying a Foundation for Nevada's Electricity Future: Generation Facility Uncertainties and the Need for a Flexible Infrastructure"
Carl Linvill, Christopher Cooke, and Suzanne Phinney - Aspen Environmental Group
http://www.ef.org/documents/Laying_a_Foundation_for_Nevada's_Electricity_Future.pdf (PDF)

"Economic Analysis of Nevada's Future Electricity-Generating Alternatives"
EcoNorthwest
http://econw.com/reports/ECONorthwest_Economic-Analysis-Nevada-Electricity-Generating-Alternatives.pdf (PDF)

"Tackling Climate Change in the U.S. - Potential U.S. Carbon Emissions Reductions from Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency by 2030"
American Solar Energy Society
http://www.ases.org/climatechange/

"The Future of Geothermal Energy: The Future of Impact of Enhanced Geothermal Systems (EGS) on the United States in the 21st Century"
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
http://www1.eere.energy.gov/geothermal/future_geothermal.html (sections)
http://www1.eere.energy.gov/geothermal/pdfs/future_geo_energy.pdf (PDF, full report, 22.6 MB)

"Renewables 2007: Global Status Report"
Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN21)
http://ren21.net/globalstatusreport/

"Don't Get Burned: The Risks of Investing In New Coal-Fired Generating Facilities"
Synapse Energy Economics, Inc.
http://www.iccr.org/news/press_releases/pdf%20files/DontGetBurned08.pdf (PDF)

"Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free: A Roadmap for U.S. Energy Policy
A Joint Project of the Nuclear Policy Research Institute and the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research
http://www.ieer.org/carbonfree/summary.pdf

"Common Sense: Making the Transition to a Sustainable Energy Economy"
American Solar Energy Society
http://www.ases.org/programs/policy/common_sense.pdf

Climate Reports

"Climate Code Red"
http://www.climatecodered.net/

"Climate Change 2007"
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
http://www.ipcc.ch/

"Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change"
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm

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Additional Resources

"A Plea for Your Leadership"
Open Letter to Nevada Governor Gibbons from Dr. James Hansen, Nevada Medal recipient, NASA Goddard Institute and Columbia University Earth Institute, April 14, 2008
http://www.usgbcnv.org/docs/pdf/Hansen2GovGibbons-080414.pdf

"A Solar Grand Plan"
Scientific American
http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=a-solar-grand-plan