Gov. Rick Perry: Wind Energy Keeps Texas' Air Clean and Our Future Bright

Remarks to the American Wind Energy Association Conference

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Monday, June 02, 2008

Thank you, Paul [Sadler, Executive Director, Wind Coalition] and congratulations for your record in developing our state’s greatest asset—our schoolchildren. I look forward to working with you to continue building a robust renewable energy market in Texas. Randy [Swisher, Exec Dir, American Wind Energy Association], it is my honor to welcome you and the Wind Energy Association to Texas. Your presence today in the Lone Star State is no accident—you are in what we would call friendly territory.

Texas doesn’t just believe in the potential of wind energy, we are reaping its benefits already. People who talk about wind energy as a technology of the future clearly haven't been to West Texas lately: the future of wind energy in Texas is now. I probably don’t need to spend too much time talking about the benefits of wind energy to a bunch of people who specialize in this remarkable technology, but a few things really stand out for me. I am proud that our state’s installed wind generation capacity leads the nation, a place we did not reach by accident.

For starters, there is no shortage of wind in Texas. Growing up in West Texas, there were times I wondered if it would ever stop blowing, especially when my parents had me raking leaves. Having seen the positive impact of wind power, I’m glad that God did not grant that particular prayer. Second, our state has a history of innovative entrepreneurs who are more than willing to invest their own financial and intellectual capital into promising energy projects. Students of Texas culture are no stranger to images of oil-soaked wildcatters, rejoicing that a gusher had come in. I don’t know if they’ll ever make the wind equivalent of the movie “There Will Be Blood.” Perhaps they could call it "There Will Be Windburn." Whether or not Hollywood ever makes that movie, the story is being told of our state’s success in the area of wind energy.

A key part of that story is an essential step we took in 2005 when I signed Senate Bill 20. This key piece of legislation established a renewable energy goal for our state, targeting 5,880 megawatts of production capacity by 2015. In true Texas style, we are already on the verge of surpassing that goal, more than six years ahead of schedule. Not surprising since we’re building out our capacity faster than any other U.S. state.

Just last year, nearly $3 billion worth of wind-powered electric generators were installed, twice as much as any other state. This addition of more than 1,600 megawatts of capacity bumped up our total wind capacity by 59 percent. And
the hits keep on coming. For example, this afternoon, one of the world's largest manufacturers of alternative energy equipment is announcing a new research facility here in Houston. And I recently got word that Hill Country Wind Power has acquired the Wind Turbine Company and is moving their manufacturing operations from Bellevue, Washington to the Lone Star state. With progress like this, I am confident we'll hit the next milestone, 10,000 megawatts, or 10% of our current capacity, well before the deadline in 2025.

ERCOT has said Texas will reach 9,000 megawatts by the end of this year, so I'd say we're on track to hit that target. We better hit it, because our state needs all the energy we can get. Nationwide, per capita energy usage continues to climb as people add new power-draining gadgets to their homes every day. Statewide, our population is growing at a rate of roughly 1,000 people per day and companies are relocating here with increasing frequency. In fact, we just vaulted over New York into first place as the state hosting the most Fortune 500 company headquarters. And our robust economy has created 1.2 million net new jobs since 2003. Not to brag, but more than half of the jobs created in the U.S. in the past year were in Texas.

Those jobs mean more office buildings, manufacturing facilities and communities to support them. And they all need energy. This growth has occurred in the context of a looming worldwide energy crisis, where much of our energy is derived from oil produced in nations that aren't always on speaking terms with ours. So the need to diversify our energy portfolio is stronger than ever. Thankfully, we are on the track with wind, nuclear, solar and biofuels.

Together, I believe these alternative energies can make up a significant portion of our future needs. But three key obstacles lie between us and the increased availability of wind energy. The first is the need to economically fund another key part of SB 20, competitive renewable energy zones. By aggregating our wind farms and building the transmission necessary to economically bring wind power to the grid, we will maximize the potential of this essential energy source. The second is the looming expiration of federal wind energy tax credits. These sensible limits have lowered the barriers to the success of this essential technology and freed capital to be used in accelerating its adoption. I believe the federal wind energy tax credits should definitely be renewed for at least another cycle, so be sure to let Washington know how you feel. The third challenge is one for the technology experts: how to store wind energy to dampen the effects of weather fluctuations. I am confident that the combined intellectual, financial and creative horsepower here at this week's conference will have that problem solved in no time. <!--[if !supportLineBreakNewLine]--> <!--[endif]-->

All in all, the prospects for wind are on the upswing all across Texas. More wind power is coming onto the grid every day and certain areas of our state are being revitalized with the influx of new developments. I'm especially encouraged by the fact that many families in rural Texas, whose grip on their land was slipping because of the rising cost of farming and ranching, can now keep their land because of revenues from hosting wind turbine towers. Ultimately, I believe wind will make our energy supply more affordable.

I encourage you, as leaders in this essential sector, to continue your good work. You have innovations to draw upon, but do not stop seeking new ways to refine the technology, new investment to build capacity, and new approaches to increase the power available to our state. Thank you for all you do to make our energy cheaper, our air cleaner and our future brighter.

God bless you and may He continue to bless the great state of Texas.