

Where Will Utah Find Power Supply?

Utah Policy Daily

December 18, 2008

What source of electrical power will meet Utah's power needs in 10 or 15 years? That's an enormous question facing Utah's electrical utilities, and it's a difficult question to answer. It needs to be answered soon to ensure adequate power supplies in the future.

At the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems' (UAMPS) annual meeting on Wednesday, that question – where Utah will obtain future power needs -- was clearly vexing community leaders. UAMPS is a joint action agency that provides wholesale electrical energy to 53 community-owned power systems, mostly in Utah but also in surrounding states.

New power sources take many years to develop, so UAMPS is making plans today to ensure adequate electrical supplies long into the future to sustain economic vitality and quality of life. Running short of electricity is simply not an option.

But it's a challenging problem. Until relatively recently, utility leaders assumed that coal-generated electricity, which is stable and inexpensive, would remain the backbone and future of power generation. Today, few people believe that any more coal-fired plants will be built. Various carbon-reduction mandates, along with lawsuits and ballot box challenges by environmental groups, will make further coal generation almost impossible. The third unit of the coal-fired IPP plant has already been lost to environmental concerns.

So where will the needed electrical power come from? UAMPS' projections, based on years of experience and data collection, indicate that even with aggressive conservation, even with aggressive development of clean energy such as wind and solar, a significant amount of additional stable, reliable electrical generating capacity will be needed.

Dianne Nielson, the governor's energy advisor, who was keynote speaker at the meeting, said she didn't know just how future energy needs will be met, but added that she wants to work with UAMPS to make certain power supplies are adequate. In a luncheon speech, Congressman **Jim Matheson** took a common-sense, practical approach to the same question, saying coal must remain part of the energy mix for many years, and new policies to combat climate change must not be so onerous as to damage the economy.

Matheson said technological breakthroughs will help the country reach energy independence, but he also said nuclear power may need to be part of the mix, with nuclear waste being safely stored on-site until reprocessing can eliminate much of the storage problem.