

Gov. Gary Herbert's energy plan includes nuclear

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SALT LAKE CITY — Despite the nuclear power-plant meltdown in Japan and its associated risks, Utah's governor said nuclear energy should be considered as the state develops its long-term energy strategy.

Speaking at the University of Utah on Friday, Gov. Gary Herbert said the issue of nuclear energy should be discussed and debated seriously regarding its possible use in the state's energy future.

"There's the role of nuclear power in the world ... in America, and specifically there's the role of nuclear power in Utah," he said. "The practical reality that we face here in this country and particularly in our state is we have a need for carbon-based fuels — which has its own challenges — and or nuclear power," Herbert said. "We need to have a vigorous debate and discussion on the viability of nuclear power in Utah."

The governor unveiled a 10-year strategic energy plan that combines using the state's abundant natural resources such as coal, along with increased development of alternative and renewable fuels like wind, solar, geothermal, as well as considering a nuclear power component.

The 42-page report stated that accomplishing the state's energy goals would require developing resources thoughtfully through careful evaluation of resource potential, impact on economic development, the natural environment, human health, along with weighing physical and regulatory constraints.

The plan was developed by the governor's energy task force, which included industry, academic, environmental and government leaders who gathered public input statewide. While the initiative included a 10-point plan of goals and mentioned using a combination of fossil fuels, renewable alternatives and nuclear power, it offered no definitive recommendations for the overall makeup of the state's energy portfolio or specific dates to reach energy milestones.

A new KSL/Deseret News poll found that a majority of Utahns surveyed have a less than favorable opinion about building a nuclear power plant in Utah. The surveyed of 432 Utahns by Dan Jones &

Associates found 55 percent opposed the idea. The poll, conducted March 15-17, had a 4.75 percent margin of error.

Amanda Smith, Utah Department of Environmental Quality director and newly appointed state energy adviser, said the inclusion of nuclear power can be "an emotional issue" for Utahns, given the state's history with nuclear testing and the resulting health fallout.

"Let's really focus on how we are going to meet our future baseload (power needs)," she said. "Every energy source that has the potential to meet baseload has issues ... and they are all kind of at their breaking point with technology."

She said considering that the world will likely look very different in the next five to 10 years energy-wise, there will be some critical challenges to meet and no energy source should be taken off the table or "ruled out now."

"We need to be discussing and looking at all these resources (and) putting money and effort into technologies and letting the market decide where they should go," Smith said.

Meanwhile, how much the inclusion of nontraditional energy resources will cost consumers is among the concerns of local energy advocates.

"We're seeing cost-effective renewable energy resources developed all over the world and all over the nation and surrounding states," said Sara Baldwin, senior policy and regulatory associate with Utah Clean Energy — a Salt Lake City-based nonprofit public interest organization. "If we're going to integrate and balance our resource portfolio with (alternative) technologies, we're going to have to give them some (economic or policy) support ... to allow them to compete on a level playing field."

Baldwin said that increased efficiencies in energy consumption and implementing stricter building standards could also be important components in helping the state meet its future energy needs.

Visit www.utah.gov/governor/docs/energy-10year-plan.pdf to view the governor's plan.

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