

Enzi: Coal will still be king

By TOM MORTON

Casper Star-Tribune staff writer

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There's no fuel like an old fuel, so coal will remain the dominant energy source for the United States for the foreseeable future, U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi said Wednesday.

But Wyoming's greatest energy resource -- and innovative ways to develop it -- receives cursory respect at best in what Enzi dubbed the "anti-energy" bill before Congress, he told the Casper Lions Club. Enzi's speech touched on what Congress has, or rather, has not accomplished in relation to immigration, health care, Head Start, the budget and earmarks, and of course politics.

He later expressed optimism for a resurgence of nuclear power, which also would be good for Wyoming because of its uranium ore deposits.

In the short run, however, the House will consider the Senate's version of an energy bill when Congress reconvenes later this month.

Enzi had criticized the bill for not providing incentives for coal-to-liquid technology of converting coal into diesel or other fuels and not providing incentives for clean-coal initiatives.

He repeated those comments on Wednesday with warnings about market effects, adding American ingenuity will find ways to resolve energy shortages. "We've used innovation; we can do that with energy," he said.

The bill restricts supplies of some energy sources, which will drive up gasoline prices, Enzi said.

Natural gas, while a clean fuel, can't be relied on for long-term electrical generation because of market uncertainties that will drive up prices, especially for residential heating, he said later at a meeting with the Casper Star-Tribune's editorial board.

However, uranium's future looks good, Enzi said.

"I see a pretty bright future for it," he said.

After the Soviet Union went "out of business," Enzi said, those overseeing the dismantling of its nuclear missiles removed the enriched uranium and sent it to nuclear power plants in the U.S. and elsewhere.

"That's been used up; we don't recycle it," he said.

Unlike European countries, U.S. nuclear power plants don't reuse their uranium, which further causes problems for waste disposal and storage, Enzi said.

The public's attitude toward nuclear power is changing from 30 years ago, after the worldwide reactions to the movie "The China Syndrome" and the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, followed by the reactor meltdown in Chernobyl, Ukraine, in 1986.

Likewise, lots of submarines and ships have their own portable nuclear power plants and operate safely, Enzi said.

As fears subside, nuclear power is gaining acceptance, and Congress is considering four nuclear power plant applications, he said.

But nuclear waste storage remains a problem.

That was exacerbated when the Energy Department cut operations and laid off most of the staff of the

Yucca Mountain nuclear waste storage project about 90 miles north of Las Vegas, Enzi said.

He thinks the layoffs are part of a political ploy on the part of House Speaker Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., to push Congress to increase funding for the department, he said.

Enzi remains confident that Yucca Mountain will continue, he said.

Reach Tom Morton at (307) 266-0592, or Tom.Morton@trib.com.