

WBR ARTICLE

FutureGen shows signs of life

By MJ Clark

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - FutureGen, the clean coal plant championed by Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal, and promoted and then abruptly killed by the Bush administration, may be back.

On March 30, Energy Secretary Steven Chu met with FutureGen Alliance officials and said that the project had merit, and that he would support it "with modifications."

Days after the plug was pulled on the original FutureGen in January 2008, the Department of Energy (DOE) announced a plan to restructure FutureGen, decentralizing the project and demonstrating advanced generating technology with carbon capture and storage (CCS) at multiple commercial-scale power plants instead of at a single pilot plant in Mattoon, Ill., which the Bush administration ruled would be too expensive.

A report issued by the U.S. Government's Accountability Office (GAO) in February 2009 cautioned that the restructuring was not based on a comprehensive analysis of costs, benefits and risks.

According to the GAO report, the DOE made its 2008 decision, largely, on the conclusion that costs for the original FutureGen had doubled and would escalate substantially. However, in its decision, DOE compared two cost estimates for the original FutureGen that were not comparable because DOE's \$950 million estimate was in constant 2004 dollars and the \$1.8 billion estimate of DOE's industry partners was inflated through 2017.

The GAO concluded that the DOE has no assurance that the restructured FutureGen is the best option to advance CCS. In other words, the report found no valid basis for the decision to stop the project.

Future Gen CEO Michael Mudd, who met with the House Science and Technology Subcommittee in mid-March, said that funding might be available for the \$1.5 billion commercial-scale plant through the economic stimulus package.

The 275-megawatt FutureGen plant is expected to revolutionize the use of coal, capturing the carbon dioxide produced and storing it deep in the earth, while removing 90 percent of the plant's emissions.

On the Web: www.futuregenalliance.org