

Gov: Wind energy needs same rules as other energy producers

By JOAN BARRON - Star-Tribune capital bureau | Posted: Thursday, October 29, 2009 1:00 am |

CHEYENNE -- Gov. Dave Freudenthal said Wednesday he hopes the Legislature next year develops some way to get revenues from development of wind resources in the coming decades.

He said during his regular weekly news conference there is a dispute among lawyers about the proper type of tax to levy to avoid being discriminatory or interfering with interstate commerce.

Wyoming Attorney General Bruce Salzburg will give Freudenthal a letter of advice concerning the tax issue, the governor said.

Freudenthal also said he hopes the Legislature next winter imposes on wind production the same requirements for bonding and reclamation, construction and maintenance of roads and possibly contributions to the schools that coal, oil and gas producers must adhere to.

"We want a level playing field among the players in the energy sector. As it sits today, there is none," Freudenthal said.

All the elements of a wind energy project are shipped here from out of state with few exceptions, he said.

"Why aren't there some plants here to make the towers, to make the turbines?" he said.

Freudenthal said he is aware of the current anti-tax political climate but added wind energy does not make the same revenue contributions as other energy producers.

The revenue from wind energy should be directed to the counties, he said.

Freudenthal had more to say about taxes Wednesday.

In the past he has been strongly opposed to an increase in the gas tax.

Rep. Mike Madden, R-Buffalo, and some other legislators visited him recently seeking his support of a fuels tax increase to go toward road construction.

Madden is a member of the Joint Revenue Committee which is considering a 10 cent hike in the gasoline tax to be phased over two years.

"I told them I would take a look at it if it got to me," Freudenthal said.

"They make a pretty interesting argument about the need for funding" given the indication the new federal highway funding bill will focus more on urban transit funding, he said.

The big problem with the interstate system is the federal government is not fulfilling its obligation to maintain the highways, he said.

Freudenthal said he would feel better talking about a gas tax increase if there were signs the federal government was going to renew its commitment to fully fund operation and maintenance of the interstate highway system.

He also reiterated his objection to highway tolls. A bill to give the state authority to develop a master plan for tolls on Interstate 80 will be submitted to the Legislature in February but will need a two-thirds majority vote to be considered.

He said supporters want him to approve the bill so they can proceed to negotiate with the Federal Highway Administration.

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