



Wyoming governor blasts EPA coal plant proposal

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CHEYENNE — The governor of Wyoming, the nation's leading coal-producing state, is calling on the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to withdraw a proposal to require carbon-capture technology in new coal-fired power plants.

EPA administrator Gina McCarthy proposed last fall to require new coal-fired power plants to employ carbon capture and sequestration technology, a process that involves intercepting emissions at the smokestack and storing them underground.

Gov. Matt Mead wrote to McCarthy on Friday, the last day for comments on the proposal, saying the EPA's proposed emissions standards for new coal-fired plants are a threat to Wyoming's economy. He said the state produces about 40 percent of the nation's coal while its coal industry employs nearly 7,000 people with a \$560 million payroll.

"Numerous air regulations have been proposed and promulgated to eliminate use of the United States' leading source of low-cost, reliable energy — coal," Mead wrote to McCarthy. "This proposal is yet one more example. The proposed regulation will adversely impact Wyoming's economy as the leading coal supplier to the United States. It lacks sound reasoning, technological justification and will not provide regulatory certainty."

Mead stated the EPA is misrepresenting the viability of the carbon-capture technology, which he said has not been integrated and proved for use at a commercial-scale coal power plant. The state has mounted a series of lawsuits under Mead's tenure against recent EPA air quality rules and regulations.

In testimony to a Senate committee earlier this year, McCarthy defended the carbon-capture requirement.

"We looked at the data available. We looked at the technologies," McCarthy told the Senate Environment Committee in January. "We made a determination that (carbon capture and storage technology) was the best system for emission reductions for coal facilities moving forward, because it was technically feasible and it would lead to significant emission reductions."

An attempt to reach an EPA spokesman for reaction to Mead's comments was not immediately successful on Friday.

Travis Deti, assistant director of the Wyoming Mining Association, on Friday applauded Mead's stand against the EPA proposal.

"We're very concerned that they're relying on technology that is not yet viable or proven," Deti said of the EPA. "And we certainly believe that it is a part of a bigger agenda and plan to eliminate coal as an electric source all together."

Jeremy Nichols, climate and energy director with the environmental group WildEarth Guardians in Denver, said Friday that Mead's opposition to federal efforts to cut pollution from coal plants has become entirely predictable. The group has challenged federal coal leasing practices in the Powder River Basin.

"Given his comments, the subtext is (Mead) just doesn't want carbon regulation, and that's just not going to fly," Nichols said. "Sorry, Gov. Mead, but America wants carbon regulation and if Wyoming doesn't like it, that's unfortunate."

Wyoming has seen its coal production dwindle in recent years as the national demand for coal has fallen. Coal-plant construction has stopped nationwide as a result of cheap natural gas and the Obama administration's continuing focus on tougher emissions standards.

Wyoming's coal production dropped from more than 430 million tons in 2011 to 385 million tons last year, according to a recent state report. Wyoming didn't see any successful federal coal lease sales last year. One scheduled sale received no bids, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management rejected the highest bid it received for another sale, saying it was below market value.

Casting about for new markets, Mead has traveled to Asia and Australia in recent months to explore the prospect of exporting coal from Wyoming's Powder River Basin to Asian markets. That idea faces opposition from many in the Northwest who don't relish the prospect of a steady stream of coal trains rumbling through on their way to deep-water coastal ports.