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Salazar, lawmakers and environmental officials bring energy to public discussion

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Loveland Reporter-Herald

FORT COLLINS — In the first of four national forums on the “New Energy Economy,” Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Gov. Bill Ritter and Rep. Betsy Markey, along with others, held an open forum to give residents an opportunity to chime in on that new, proposed economy.

The two-hour, invitation-only forum, held at Fossil Ridge High School, was a way for President Barack Obama’s administration and local government leaders to reach out to the community and share their views on the importance of new, clean and renewable energies.

“This is part of what I think is a crusade of our times,” Salazar said. “When you think about what will happen between now and the end of the decade, we will define the world for the next century and the world beyond. It’s going to take the involvement of the American people, and because of that, we will get it done.”

Added Ritter, speaking specifically to the high school audience in attendance, “It’s a cultural shift that’s taking place, and what that means is that not only you and your personal habits are going to shift, but it has to be something you talk about with your peer group.”

The forum included discussion on topics such as what that new economy looks like, energy use on public and federal lands and climate change, as well as a broad swath of other issues.

The New Economy

All of the members of the panel, which included Nancy Sutley, chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and Mike Chrisman, California’s secretary for natural resources, agreed the new economy would create jobs if stimulated.

“We think it requires creating an entire ecosystem that supports the entire path, and the starting place for the world is research and development,” Ritter said, complimenting local universities and programs for their contribution to research.

Salazar said he understands the challenges of finding support for building the economy, especially from Congress. But he also said the administration is committed to moving legislation through to meet those goals.

“These things are not Democrat or Republican issues,” Salazar said. “This is an issue where the very future of our children and the planet are hanging in peril. The president is 100 percent committed to that goal and getting it done.”

Markey and Ritter both cited a number of private companies — such as Vestas in Windsor, Brighton and Pueblo, which makes wind turbines — as examples of how high-paying, desirable jobs are created with new-energy companies.

“This is a good change, but it’s hard,” Markey said, referring to an energy bill the House of Representatives passed by 219 votes, just one vote more than the 218 needed.

“I do think the Senate is hard on this, but they’ll get there if we continue to emphasize the positive.”



Reporter-Herald/Christopher Stark
Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar speaks with members of the media Thursday after a Clean Energy Economy Forum at Fossil Ridge High School in Fort Collins. From left are Washington state’s director of ecology, Jay Manning; Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter; U.S. Rep. Betsy Markey; Nancy Sutley, chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality; and Mike Chrisman, California secretary for natural resources.

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Energy on Public Lands

Salazar addressed concerns about using public lands for energy development but said the administration was moving forward with some plans, including a natural gas pipeline in Alaska. He said the president’s energy agenda includes more than just clean, renewable energy.

“When we talk about our comprehensive energy plan, we’re talking, yes, about harnessing new opportunities,” Salazar said. “But there is also very much a place at the table for our conventional

fuels. We support the development of natural gas resources. ... The president said coal is to us the way oil is to Saudi Arabia. We need to burn it cleanly and sequester it.”

Climate Change

Sutley addressed rising temperatures in areas of the U.S., saying the average temperature in the Southwest has increased in recent years by 3 degrees Fahrenheit. Part of the motivation to develop new clean energies, such as solar, wind and geothermal, is to tackle the problem of greenhouse gases, she said.

“This discussion is really about the future,” she said. “We have a lot of opportunities here in the form of a better America, and I think it’s an important conversation to have, the impact of climate change.”

Added Salazar: “This is a real issue. These are not scare tactics.”

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