

## Talbott: Energy, money saved

What's not to like?

By [Clint Talbott](#) ([Contact](#))  
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The cheapest energy is that which is never used. Conservation saves money, resources and the environment. We shouldn't need a law to ratify that bit of common sense. But apparently, we do. It's good to see that legislators seem up to the job.

On Tuesday, a state House committee approved a bill mandating sound energy-efficiency programs. House Bill 1107, sponsored by Boulder Democrat Claire Levy, would require smaller utility companies to launch energy-efficiency initiatives.

A similar bill that covered investor-owned utilities like Xcel Energy became law last year. In response, Xcel has boosted its rebate, technical-assistance and other efficiency programs. These programs will save customers \$1.3 billion and eliminate the need for one large power plant, Xcel says.

Levy's bill, which is also sponsored by Boulder Democrat Jack Pommer, applies to rural-electric associations and municipal utilities, which generate about 40 percent of the state's electricity. The measure would direct the smaller utilities to spend at least 2 percent of their revenue on energy-efficiency programs for customers beginning in 2010.

The utilities would offer programs such as low-cost energy audits, rebates on high-efficiency appliances and cut-rate compact-fluorescent light bulbs. The affected utilities would spend about \$32 million annually, according to the Colorado Public Interest Research Group.

But the savings would be impressive. By making that modest investment, the utilities would save about 420 megawatts of peak electric power demand, and about 1.5 billion kilowatt-hours per year by 2020. The latter figure is about what it takes to power 170,000 households, CoPIRG says.

Levy's bill would yield consumers and businesses \$600 million in economic benefits over the next dozen years, according to the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project, a nonprofit group. It would also, obviously, improve carbon dioxide emissions. By 2020, the bill would prevent the emission of 1.4 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually.

While acknowledging the efficacy of "demand-side management" programs, some observers wonder if the smaller utilities will be able to reap benefits as large as those projected. That's a fair question. But even if the economic benefits are smaller than anticipated, it's worth noting that the environmental benefits are more than worthy.

The world's leading climate scientists say that averting dangerous levels of warming, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions must peak and decline in the next 10 to 15 years. They say global greenhouse-gas emissions must be at least 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

Modest measures like Levy's bill won't move us substantially closer to such daunting goals. But even small steps in the right direction are worth taking. And the fact that Levy's bill would save energy, emissions and money should make it a slam dunk.

*Clint Talbott, for the editorial board*