



Saturday, January 22, 2005
Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal

Governor to push for energy programs

By JOHN G. EDWARDS
REVIEW-JOURNAL

An energy conservation study released this month implies that Gov. Kenny Guinn will ask the state Legislature to adopt aggressive energy conservation measures this year.

State officials, however, are reluctant to talk about energy legislation before Guinn's State of the State address Monday, which may address his priorities for energy bills, and in advance of his energy office's annual report Friday.

However, the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project earlier this month issued a report outlining 14 potential programs that could be adopted.

The report identified seven of those proposals as high-priority items. Those include provisions that would require legislation -- efficiency standards for some electric-powered equipment, and electric and natural gas conservation proposals.

Guinn has not said he will propose any of the measures, but he already has shown his commitment to energy conservation, both in public statements and financial contributions.

"By increasing energy efficiency in a time of high energy prices, we protect Nevada's economic vitality," Guinn said in a statement accompanying the Jan. 12 release of the report. "I am grateful for SWEEP's insights and will be proposing new policies for increasing energy efficiency in the near future."

His energy office provided \$10,000 for the \$50,000 study. Other money came from Nevada Power Co. and the Energy Fund of San Francisco.

The study concluded that Nevada could save \$5 billion over the next 15 years if the state adopted the policies for energy conservation.

Richard Burdette, Guinn's energy adviser, said the report and its findings impressed him.

"We live in the desert, for Pete's sake," he said. "We need to do things that are sensible and sustainable."

He was reluctant to discuss specific proposals.

One of these urges the state to set appliance efficiency minimums by 2008 for equipment not governed by federal efficiency minimums. These products don't include appliances for which the federal government has already set minimum efficiency standards, because federal law prevents Nevada officials from doing that.

However, states can set minimum efficiency standards for products that do not have federally mandated requirements. These products include commercial clothes washers, convenience store refrigerators and freezers, ice makers, pool pumps and traffic lights. Nevada would be following the same standards adopted earlier by California, said Howard Geller, executive director of the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project.

"We don't want to see Nevada become the dumping ground for inefficient products that can no longer be sold in California," he said.

A second proposal calls for energy savings standards that require investor-owned electric utilities to save a minimum amount of energy each year.

Nevada could adopt energy savings standards for Nevada Power and Sierra Pacific Power separately, according to the study. Alternatively, state officials could make them part of the state's renewable energy standards, according to the the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project study.

As a third proposal, the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project set a 1 percent savings target for natural-gas consumption yearly, half the savings that a study found was possible in Utah. The savings could result from increased funds for weatherizing the homes of low-income residents, rebates for customers buying high efficiency products such as furnaces and water heaters and selling low-flow shower heads and water heater insulation at discounted prices.

The Nevada study, however, notes that Southwest Gas has seen a decline in the volume of gas sales per customer in recent years. The study says that gas distribution companies need to be protected from reduced profits that could result from conservation programs.