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Guest Editorial

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Stephen Wiel: Improved efficiency is best way to save energy

Nevadans are busily sketching out plans for solar, wind and geothermal plants and dreaming of the green energy -- and clean energy jobs -- these plants will create.

This is an opportunity for long-term economic growth in a state that needs diversification. But let's not forget that the quickest way to cut our energy use -- and cut your electric bill -- is to reduce the energy we use today in our homes and businesses.

The Southwest Energy Efficiency Project works with utilities and their regulators to cut energy use in existing households and businesses with state-of-the-art technology. We also promote stronger building energy codes for new homes and commercial buildings to make them 25-50 percent more energy efficient.

Energy efficiency is the perfect alignment of economic and environmental concerns: The less energy we use, the less we spend on energy bills and the less we foul our air.

Sometimes there is an initial investment to install a more efficient furnace or purchase a higher quality of insulation, but this cost is recouped many times over in annual energy savings. Studies show that investing in energy efficiency creates many times more jobs than investing in the outdated power plants of the past.

A new report from the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy finds that the average Nevada household could save \$398 per year and the state would benefit from the creation of 4,900 new sustainable jobs over the next 10 years if the Senate acts now to strengthen the energy-efficiency measures in the American Clean Energy and Security Act passed by the House in June.

The House bill contains a number of important measures to increase energy efficiency, such as requiring utilities to help their customers save energy, setting standards to make new buildings more efficient, funding state programs that retrofit existing homes to save money on energy bills and investing in a smart grid that uses digital technology to deliver our electricity more efficiently.

Strengthening the energy-efficiency provisions in the House bill would prevent 5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide from being emitted into the atmosphere just in Nevada -- the equivalent of taking more than a million passenger cars off of the road for one year.

By 2030, we could create 7,800 new Nevada jobs and save Nevada households \$922 a year in electric bills, according to the ACEEE study.

Unfortunately, powerful interests in the fossil fuel and homebuilding industries have made false claims that switching to clean energy and emphasizing efficiency measures would cost too much. The truth is that not switching to clean energy and emphasizing efficiency measures would risk the most costly and highly fluctuating energy prices.

It's time for us as Americans and Nevadans to invest in a clean-energy economy. Talk to your senators, talk to your representatives, talk to your local reporters, talk to your friends. Let's show that Nevadans can rally bipartisan support for legislation that's clearly good for Nevada.

Stephen Wiel is the Nevada state representative of the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project.
