

Hereth Sandlin visits Howard wind-blade plant

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Lawmaker in area to discuss progress and challenges of renewable energy

Rep. Stephanie Hereth Sandlin met public officials and members of the wind energy industry in Howard on Wednesday to discuss some of the progress made by renewable energy producers and some of the challenges they face.

Hereth Sandlin (D-SD) held a roundtable discussion with about 12 men and women at the Knight & Carver plant in Howard. Knight & Carver opened a wind-blade manufacturing and repair plant earlier this year, and company officials spoke to Hereth Sandlin about their decision to move into South Dakota.

Joe Kolbach, a Howard native and president of Energy Maintenance Service, also described how his wind-energy service company expanded in Howard. Kolbach and the other roundtable participants discussed the issues that the wind-energy industry faces.

The participants generally agreed that the wind-generated electricity industry could receive a boost if its production were “mainstreamed” into the nation’s electrical grid instead of being treated as an alternative energy resource.

Wally Thompson of Alternergy LLC told Hereth Sandlin that Western Area Power Administration officials have expressed an interest in supplying wind-generated electricity to their customers. However, WAPA’s mandate centers on hydroelectric power distribution,

not wind energy, Thompson said.

WAPA markets and delivers electricity from multi-use water projects to customers in a 15-state region.

Thompson added that when WAPA’s supply of hydropower falls short of demand, the agency has to purchase power on the electricity market — electricity that often comes from coal-fired plants.

Hereth Sandlin said that the nation’s electrical grid has the capability to transmit wind energy, but that suppliers, distributors and public officials need to further develop the industry’s potential.

According to Hereth Sandlin, South Dakota has the resources to grow into a major producer of “green” energy and also help the environment by helping industry with carbon sequestration, an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

“We need to make the case that South Dakota is part of the solution with its wind resources,” Hereth Sandlin said.

She offered to help arrange a meeting in South Dakota among wind energy representatives, the U.S. congressional delegation, Gov. Mike Rounds, state legislators, American Indian tribal representatives, state public utilities commissioners and others to discuss the development of wind energy. She proposed that the representatives meet this fall or early winter to discuss a development plan.

“We have to develop a common objective,” Hereth Sandlin said. “We can put to-

gether a plan for economic development and creating jobs and figure out how to get to the next level.”

Randy Parry, executive director of Miner County Community Revitalization, said the Howard community would have an interest in hosting such a meeting.

Herseth Sandlin added that she would like to see the South Dakota Legislature pass a bill similar to the Renewable Electricity Standard legislation that passed through the U.S. House chamber earlier this month. One part of the bill requires that utilities produce 15 percent of their power from sources such as wind, solar and biomass by 2022. The House bill also sets production standards for ethanol and promotes increased efficiency for appliances and buildings.

Herseth Sandlin also toured the nearby Energy Maintenance Service plant in Howard, a facility that services wind turbines. Knight and Carver and EMS work together on several wind-energy projects.