

Wind energy on Thune agenda today

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WAPA to discuss rate hike due to drought

HOWARD — U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-SD, will visit the area today and plans to cite rising hydroelectric power rates as one of the reasons to expand the nation's wind industry.

Thune will be in Howard this afternoon. He plans a tour of Knight and Carver at 4pm, followed by a tour of Energy Maintenance Service. Both companies are active in the wind industry.

Also today, the Western Area Power Administration will host a public meeting in Sioux Falls to discuss a proposed 25 percent increase in the price of electric power generated by dams on the Missouri River. The meeting will begin at 9am in the Holiday Inn at 100 W. Eighth St.

"Sen. Thune is concerned about rising energy costs and is working on developing alternative energy in South Dakota," Thune spokesman Kyle Downey said Monday. "(Today), Sen. Thune will be addressing the development of wind energy in South Dakota as a way of responding to increasing energy costs."

WAPA, the federal agency that sells the power generated by the dams, says continuing drought conditions are driving the proposed increase in power rates. When the water behind the dams is too low to produce an adequate output, WAPA buys power from alternative sources to cover the shortfall. The alternative power is more expensive, so WAPA

has to raise its prices. Drought conditions already have driven the price of WAPA power over 37 percent higher over the past four years.

Some of the local utilities that buy electricity from WAPA have been forced to pass the rate increases on to their own customers. Municipally owned utilities are suffering the biggest impact, because many of them buy the majority of their power from WAPA. Howard's municipal utility, for example, gets 60 percent of its power from WAPA and was recently forced to raise rates.

Other towns in the region that get power from WAPA are Burke, Pickstown, Plankinton, Tyndall, Wessington Springs and Winner.

Rural electric cooperatives also buy WAPA power, but they are less reliant on it and are therefore less affected by WAPA rate increases. Investor-owned utilities — such as NorthWestern Energy, which serves Mitchell—do not receive WAPA power.

