

Speakers: EPA goals unrealistic

By SHANE ARRINGTON
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HUNTINGTON — New rules and goals set by the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants are unrealistic, according to speakers at the 10th annual Energy and Natural Resources Symposium on Thursday at St. Mary's Center for Education.

Featured speakers were Mark McCullough, executive vice president of generation for American Electric Power; Jeff Herholdt, West Virginia Division of Energy director; and David Flannery, attorney with Steptoe & Johnson. The symposium was hosted by Natural Resource Partners and the Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce. West Virginia Delegate Kevin Craig, executive vice president of coal for NRP, was the event moderator.

While each speaker took different angles, the common theme

was the EPA's goal of reducing CO₂ emissions by 30 percent from 2005 levels by 2030 simply cannot be done.

"Somewhere there was a lack of consideration for practical reliability," McCullough said. "It's not a matter of won't; we can't meet these new requirements and keep providing reliable, affordable service to our customers."

McCullough said the EPA is taking a non-traditional approach to its Clean Power Plan. Instead of setting emission limits for power plants, it has set building blocks that reach far beyond power plant operations, he said.

Those four blocks, which the EPA is using to put together the system of emissions reductions as specified under the Clean Air Act, Section 111 (d), include efficiency improvements for coal plants, increased use of natural gas plants to displace coal, increased renew-



Mark McCullough, executive vice president of Generation of American Electric Power (AEP) speaks during Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce's 10th annual Energy and Natural Resources Symposium on Thursday at St. Mary's Conference Center in Huntington. Photo by Sholten Singer/The Herald-Dispatch

ables and preserve nuclear, and increase overall energy efficiency. McCullough said the idea is not bad, that a diverse fuel supply for electric power is important, but that the EPA's current proposal is not grounded in reality.

Even without proposed CO₂ regulations, AEP is already reducing its emissions, McCullough said. A slide he presented during the symposium showed AEP emissions have declined by 21 percent since 2005, and are expected to decline by another 5 percent or more by 2020.

Delegate Kevin Craig thanks sponsors during Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce's 10th annual Energy and Natural Resources Symposium on Thursday, at St. Mary's Conference Center in Huntington. Photo by Sholten Singer/The Herald-Dispatch

Herholdt said while a lot of attention is focused on coal-burning power plants regarding CO₂ emissions, most come from petroleum, not coal.

"The transportation sector is responsible for more CO₂ emissions than coal-powered plants — you'd think we'd focus on that," Herholdt said. "Truth is, we are the only country with a significant emission reduction in the world."

Herholdt highlighted that while the U.S. is No. 2 in the world in CO₂ emissions, only behind China, from 2005-12 it has reduced its overall emissions by nearly 13 percent.

Besides the alleged impracticalities of the proposed regulations, matters of legality were also brought up during the symposium. Flannery, an experienced environmental and energy lawyer, said he has real questions about the EPA's

ability to enforce Section 111 (b) of the Clean Air Act. He said the provision has been in place since 1977, but has rarely been used, and is only now being brought up as part of a national energy program.

Flannery said it will be years before this is worked out in court, and he foresees the presidential election in 2016 and possible U.S. Supreme Court changes to play an important role in its outcome.

However, while waiting on an outcome, electric providers are in a tough position in working on reasonable and affordable ways to improve efficiency and provide the best service to their customers when they don't know what future regulations will be, McCullough said.

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